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THE SMUGGLER:
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.
VOL. LXXIX.

THE SMUGGLER BY G. P. R. JAMES.

IN ONE VOLUME.

LEIPZIG
BRUNN TAUCHNITZ JUN.
1845.

COLLECTION

280 HORS.



BRITISH

THE SMOGGER BY G. P. R. JAMES

IN ONE VOLUME

THE SMUGGLER:

A TALE.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES.

SANCTIONED

BY THE AUTHOR FOR CONTINENTAL CIRCULATION.



LEIPZIG

BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1845.

THE REGISTER

A TALE



OF THE AUTHOR FOR CONSERVATION OF THE LIBRARY

LEIPZIG

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1848

DEDICATION.

TO

THE HON^{BLE} CHARLES EWAN LAW, M.P.

RECORDER OF LONDON,

ETC. ETC. ETC.

MY DEAR SIR,

It would be almost superfluous to assure you of my esteem and regard; but feelings of personal friendship are rarely assigned as the sole motives of a dedication. The qualities, however, which command public respect, and the services which have secured it to you in so high a degree, must appear a sufficient motive for offering you this slight tribute, in the eyes not only of those who know and love you in the relations of private life, but of all the many who have marked your career, either as a lawyer, alike eminent in learning and in eloquence, or as a just, impartial, clear-sighted, and yet merciful judge.

You will willingly accept the book, I know, for the sake of the author; though, perhaps, you may have neither time nor inclination to read it. Accept the dedication, also, I beg, as a sincere testimony of respect from one, who, having seen a good deal of the world, and studied mankind attentively, is not easily induced to reverence or won to regard.

When you look upon this page, it will probably call to your mind some very pleasant hours, which would doubtless have been as agreeable if I had not been there. As I write it, it brings up before my eyes many a various scene, of which you and yours were the embellishment and the light. At all events, such memories must be pleasant to us both; for they refer to days almost without a shadow, when the magistrate and the legislator escaped from care and thought, and the laborious man of letters cast away his toil.

In the following pages, you will find more than one place depicted, as familiar to your remembrance as to mine; and if I have taken some liberties with a few localities, stolen a mile or two off certain distances, or deprived various hills and dales of their due proportions, these faults are of a species of petty larceny, on which I do not think you will pass a severe sentence, and I hope the public will imitate your lenity.

I trust that no very striking errors will meet your eye; for I believe I have given a correct picture of the state of society in this good county of Kent, as it existed some eighty or ninety years ago; and, in regard to the events, if you or

any of my readers should be inclined to exclaim — “This incident is not probable!” I have an answer ready, quite satisfactory to myself, whatever it may be to others; namely, that “the improbable incident” is true. All the more wild, stirring, and what may be called romantic parts of the tale, are not alone *founded* upon fact, but are facts; and the narrative owes me nothing more than a gown owes to a sempstress — namely, the mere sewing of it together with a very common-place needle and thread. In short, a few characters thrown in for relief, a little love, a good deal of landscape, and a few tiresome reflections, are all that I have added to a simple relation of transactions well known to many in this part of the country, as having actually happened, a generation or two ago. Amongst these recorded incidents, are the attack of Goudhurst Church by the smugglers, its defence by the peasantry, the pursuit, and defeat of the free-traders of those days by the dragoons, the implication of some persons of great wealth in the most heinous parts of the transaction, the visit of Mowle, the officer, in disguise, to the meeting-place of his adversaries, his accidental detection by one of them, and the bold and daring manœuvre of the smuggler, Harding, as related near the close of the work. Another incident, but too sadly true — namely, the horrible deed by which some of the persons taking a chief part in the contraband trade, called down upon themselves the fierce enmity of the peasantry — I have but lightly touched upon, for reasons you will understand and appreciate. But it is some satisfaction to know

that there were just judges in those days, as well as at present, and that the perpetrators of one of the most brutal crimes on record, suffered the punishment they so well merited.

Happily, my dear Sir, a dedication, in these days, is no compliment; and therefore I can freely offer, and you receive it, as a true and simple expression of high respect and regard,

From yours faithfully,

G. P. R. JAMES.

THE SMUGGLER.

CHAPTER I.

It is wonderful what improvements have taken place in clocks and watches during the last half-century; how accurately the escapements are constructed, how delicately the springs are formed, now easily the wheels move, and what good time they keep. After all, society is but a clock, a very complicated piece of mechanism; and it, too, has undergone, in many countries, the same improvements that have taken place in the little ticking machines that we put in our pockets, or those greater indicators of our progress towards eternity that we hang upon our walls. From the wooden clock, with its weight and catgut, to the exquisite chronometer which varies only by a second or two in the course of the year, what a vast advance! and between even a period which many still living can remember, and that in which I now write, what a change has taken place in the machinery and organization of the land in which we dwell!

In the times which I am about to depict, though feudal ages were gone, though no proud barons ruled the country round from castle and stronghold, though the tumultuous times of the great rebellion had also passed away, and men in buff and bandolier no longer preached, or fought, or robbed, or tyrannized, under the name of law and liberty, though the times of the second Charles, and the second James, William and Mary, and good Queen Anne, falling collars, and hats and plumes, and floating wigs and broad-tailed coats, were all gone — bundled away into the great lumber-room of the Past — still, dear reader, there was a good deal of the wooden clock about the mechanism of society.

One of the parts in which rudeness of construction and coarseness of material were most apparent, was, in the Customs system of the country, and in the impediments which it met with. The escapement was anything but fine. Now-a-days we do things delicately. If we wish to cheat the government, we forge Exchequer bills, or bribe landing-waiters and supervisors, or courteously insinuate to a superior officer that a thousand pounds is not too great a mark of gratitude for enabling us to pocket twenty thousand at the expense of the Customs. If we wish to cheat the public, there is chalk for our milk, grains of paradise for our beer, sago and old rags for our sugar, lime for our linen, and devils' dust to cover our backs. Chemistry and electricity, steam and galvanism, all lend their excellent aid to the cheat, the swindler, and the thief; and if a man is inclined to keep himself within respectable limits, and deceive himself and others at the same time, with perfect good faith and due decorum, are there not homœopathy, hydropathy, and mesmerism?

In the days I speak of, it was not so. There was a grander roughness and daringness about both our rogues and our theorists. None but a small villain would consent to be a swindler. We had more robbers than cheats; and if a man chose to be an impostor, it was with all the dignity and decision of a Psalmanazor, or a bottle conjuror. Gunpowder and lead were the only chemical agents employed; a bludgeon was the animal magnetism most in vogue, and your senses and your person were attacked and knocked down upon the open road without having the heels of either delicately tripped up by some one you did not see.

Still this difference was more apparent in the system of smuggling than in anything else, and the whole plan, particulars, course of action and results were so completely opposed to anything that is, or can be in the present day — the scenes, the characters, the very localities have so totally changed, that it may be necessary to pause a moment before we go on to tell our tale, in order to give some sort of description of the state of the country bordering on the sea-coast, at the period to which I allude.

Scarcely any one of the maritime counties was, in those days, without its gang of smugglers; for if France was not opposite,

Holland was not far off; and if brandy was not the object, nor silk, nor wine, yet tea and cinnamon, and hollands, and various East India goods, were things duly estimated by the British public, especially when they could be obtained without the payment of Custom-House dues. But besides the inducements to smuggling, which the high price that those dues imposed upon certain articles, held out, it must be remembered that various other commodities were totally prohibited, and as an inevitable consequence, were desired and sought for more than any others. The nature of both man and woman, from the time of Adam and Eve down to the present day, has always been fond of forbidden fruit; and it mattered not a pin whether the goods were really better or worse, so that they were prohibited, men would risk their necks to get them. The system of prevention also was very inefficient, and a few scattered Custom-House officers, aided by a cruiser here or there upon the coast, had an excellent opportunity of getting their throats cut or their heads broken, or of making a decent livelihood by conniving at the transactions they were sent down to stop, as the peculiar temperament of each individual might render such operations pleasant to him. Thus, to use one of the smugglers' own expressions — a *roaring* trade in contraband goods was going on along the whole British coast, with very little let or hindrance.

As there are land-sharks and water-sharks, so were there then (and so are there now) land-smugglers and water-smugglers. The latter brought the objects of their commerce, either from foreign countries or from foreign vessels, and landed them on the coast — and a bold, daring, reckless body of men they were; the former, in gangs, consisting frequently of many hundreds, generally well mounted and armed, conveyed the commodities so landed into the interior, and distributed them to others, who retailed them as occasion required. Nor were these gentry one whit less fearless, enterprising, and lawless than their brethren of the sea.

We have not yet done, however, with all the ramifications of this vast and magnificent league, for it extended itself, in the districts where it existed, to almost every class of society. Each tradesman smuggled or dealt in smuggled goods; each public-house was supported by smugglers, and gave them in return every

facility possible; each country gentleman on the coast dabbled a little in the interesting traffic; almost every magistrate shared in the proceeds or partook of the commodities. Scarcely a house but had its place of concealment, which would accommodate either kegs or bales, or human beings, as the case might be; and many streets in sea-port towns had private passages from one house to another, so that the gentleman inquired for by the officers at No. 1, was often walking quietly out of No. 20, while they were searching for him in vain. The back of one street had always excellent means of communication with the front of another; and the gardens gave exit to the country with as little delay as possible.

Of all counties, however, the most favoured by nature and by art for the very pleasant and exciting sport of smuggling, was the county of Kent; its geographical position, its local features, its variety of coast, all afforded it the greatest advantages; and the daring character of the natives on the shores of the Channel was sure to turn those advantages to the purposes in question. Sussex, indeed, was not without its share of facilities, nor did the Sussex men fail to improve them; but they were so much farther off from the opposite coast, that the commerce — which we may well call the regular trade — was, at Hastings, Rye, and Winchelsea, in no degree to be compared to that which was carried on from the North Foreland to Romney Hoy.

At one time, the fine level of “The Marsh,” a dark night and a fair wind, afforded a delightful opportunity for landing a cargo and carrying it rapidly into the interior; at another time, Sandwich Flats and Pevensey Bay presented a harbour of refuge, and a place of repose to kegs innumerable and bales of great value; at another period, the cliffs round Folkestone and near the South Foreland, saw spirits travelling up by paths which seemed inaccessible to mortal foot; and at another, the wild and broken ground at the back of Sandgate was traversed by long trains of horses, escorting or carrying every description of contraband articles.

The interior of the country was not less favourable to the traffic than the coast: large masses of wood, numerous gentlemen's

parks, hills and dales tossed about in wild confusion; roads such as nothing but horses could travel, or men on foot, often constructed with felled trees or broad stones laid side by side; wide tracts of ground, partly copse and partly moor, called in that county "minnisses;" and a long extent of the Weald of Kent, through which no high way existed, and where such thing as coach or carriage was never seen, — offered the land-smugglers opportunities of carrying on their transactions with the degree of secrecy and safety which no other county afforded. Their numbers, too, were so great, their boldness and violence so notorious, their powers of injuring or annoying so various, that even those who took no part in their operations were glad to connive at their proceedings, and at times to aid in concealing their persons or their goods. Not a park, not a wood, not a barn, did not at some period afford them a refuge when pursued, or become a depository for their commodities, and many a man, on visiting his stable or his cart-shed early in the morning, found it tenanted by anything but horses or wagons. The churchyards were frequently crowded at night by other spirits than those of the dead, and not even the church was exempted from such visitations.

None of the people of the county took notice of, or opposed, these proceedings; the peasantry laughed at, or aided, and very often got a good day's work, or at all events a jug of genuine hollands from the friendly smugglers; the clerk and the sexton willingly aided and abetted, and opened the door of vault, or vestry, or church, for the reception of the passing goods; the clergyman shut his eyes, if he saw tubs or stone jars in his way; and it is remarkable what good brandy punch was generally to be found at the house of the village pastor. The magistrates of the county, when called upon to aid in pursuit of the smugglers, looked grave, and swore in constables very slowly; despatched servants on horseback, to see what was going on, and ordered the steward or the butler to "*send the sheep to the wood*," an intimation that was not lost upon those for whom it was intended. The magistrates and officers of seaport towns were in general so deeply implicated in the trade themselves, that smuggling had a fairer chance than the law, in any case that came before them, and

never was a more hopeless enterprise undertaken, in ordinary circumstances, than that of convicting a smuggler, unless captured in flagrant delict.

Were it only our object to depict the habits and manners of these worthy people, we might take any given part of the seaward side of Kent that we chose for the particular description; for it was all the same. No railroads had penetrated through the country then; no coast blockade was established; even martello-towers were unknown; and in the general confederacy or understanding which existed throughout the whole of the county, the officers found it nearly a useless task to attempt to execute their duty. Nevertheless, as it is a tale I have to tell, not a picture to paint, I may as well dwell for a few minutes upon the scene of the principal adventures about to be related. A long range of hills, varying greatly in height and steepness, runs nearly down the centre of the county of Kent, throwing out spurs or buttresses in different directions, and sometimes leaving broad and beautiful valleys between. The origin or base, if we may so call it, of this range is the great Surrey chain of hills; not that it is perfectly connected with that chain, for in many places a separation is found, through which the Medway, the Stour, and several smaller rivers wind onward to the Thames or to the sea; but still the general connexion is sufficiently marked, and from Dover and Folkestone, by Chart, Lenham, Maidstone, and Westerham, on the one side, and Barham, Harbledown, and Rochester, on the other, the road runs generally over a long line of elevated ground, only dipping down here and there to visit some town or city of importance which has nested itself in one of the lateral valleys, or strayed out into the plain.

On the northern side of the county, a considerable extent of flat ground extends along the bank and estuary of the Thames from Greenwich to Sandwich and Deal. On the southern side, a still wider extent lies between the high-land and the borders of Sussex. This plain or valley, as perhaps it may be called, terminates at the sea by the renowned flat of Romney Marsh. Farther up, somewhat narrowing as it goes, it takes the name of the Weald of Kent, comprising some very rich land and a number of small

villages, with one or two towns of no very great importance. This Weald of Kent is bordered all along by the southern side of the hilly range we have mentioned; but strange to say, although a very level piece of ground was to be had through this district, the high road perversely pursued its way up and down the hills, by Lenham and Charing, till it thought fit to descend to Ashford, and thence once more make its way to Folkestone. Thus a great part of the Weald of Kent was totally untravelled; and at one village of considerable size, which now hears almost hourly the panting and screaming steam-engine whirled by, along its iron course, I have myself seen the whole population of the place turn out to behold the wonderful phenomenon of a coach-and-four, the first that was ever beheld in the place. Close to the sea the hills are bare enough; but at no great distance inland, they become rich in wood, and the Weald, whether arable or pasture, or hop-garden or orchard, is so divided into small fields by numerous hedgerows of fine trees, and so diversified by patches of woodland, that, seen at a little distance up the hill — not high enough to view it like a map — it assumes, in the leafy season, almost the look of a forest partially cleared.

Along the southern edge, then, of the hills we have mentioned, and in the plainer valley that stretches away from their feet, amongst the woods, and hedgerows, and villages, and parks which embellish that district, keeping generally in Kent, but sometimes trespassing a little upon the fair county of Sussex, lies the scene of the tale which is to follow, at a period when the high calling, or vocation, of smuggling was in its most palmy days. But ere I proceed to conduct the reader into the actual locality where the principal events here recorded really took place, I must pause for an instant in the capital, to introduce him to one or two travelling companions.

CHAPTER II.

It was in the grey of the morning — and very grey, indeed, the morning was, with much more black than white in the air, much more of night still remaining in the sky than of day appearing in

the east — when, from the old Golden Cross, Charing Cross, or rather from the low and narrow archway which, at that time, gave exit from its yard into the open street exactly opposite the statue of King Charles, issued forth a vehicle which had not long lost the name of diligence, and assumed that of stage-coach. Do not let the reader delude himself into the belief that it was like the stage-coach of his own recollections in any other respect than in having four wheels, and two doors, and windows. Let not fancy conjure up before him flat sides of a bright claret colour, and a neat boot as smooth and shining as a looking-glass, four bays, or browns, or greys, three-parts blood, and a coachman the pink of all propriety. Nothing of the kind was there. The vehicle was large and roomy, capable of containing within, at least, six travellers of large size. It was hung in a somewhat straggling manner upon its almost upright springs, and was elevated far above any necessary pitch. The top was decorated with round iron rails on either side; and multitudinous were the packages collected upon the space so enclosed; while a large cage-like instrument behind contained one or two travellers, and a quantity of parcels. The colour of the sides was yellow; but the numerous inscriptions which they bore in white characters left little of the ground-work to be seen; for the name of every place at which the coach stopped, was there written for the convenience of travellers who might desire to visit any town upon the road; so that each side seemed more like a leaf out of a topographical dictionary of the county of Kent than anything else. Underneath the carriage was a large wicker basket, or cradle, also filled with trunk-mails, and various other contrivances for holding the goods and chattels of passengers; and the appearance of the whole was as lumbering and heavy as that of a hippopotamus. The coachman mounted on the box was a very different looking animal even from our friend Mr. Weller, though the inimitable portrait of that gentleman is now, alas, but a record of an extinct creature! However, as we have little to do with the driver of the coach, I shall not pause to give a long account of his dress or appearance; and, only noticing that the horses before him formed as rough and shambling a team of nags as ever were seen, shall proceed to speak of the travellers who occupied the interior of the vehicle.

Although, as we have seen, the coach would have conveniently contained six, it was now only tenanted by three persons. The first, who had entered at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, was a tall, thin, elderly gentleman, dressed with scrupulous care and neatness. His linen and his neckcloth were as white as snow, his shoes, his silk stockings, his coat, his waistcoat, and his breeches as black as jet; his hat was in the form of a Banbury cake; the buckles in his shoes, and at his knees, were large and resplendent; and a gold-headed cane was in his hand. To keep him from the cold, he had provided himself with a garment which would either serve for a cloak or a coat, as he might find agreeable, being extensive enough for the former, and having sleeves to enable it to answer the purpose of the latter. His hair and eyebrows were as white as driven snow, but his eyes were still keen, quick, and lively. His colour was high, his teeth were remarkably fine, and the expression of his countenance was both intelligent and benevolent, though there was a certain degree of quickness in the turn of the eyes, which, together with a sudden contraction of the brow when anything annoyed him, and a mobility of the lips, seemed to betoken a rather hasty and irascible spirit.

He had not been in the coach more than a minute and a half, — but was beginning to look at a huge watch, which he drew from his fob, and to “pish” at the coachman for being a minute behind his time, — when he was joined by two other travellers of a very different appearance and age from himself. The one who entered first was a well-made, powerful man, who might be either six-and-twenty or two-and-thirty. He could not well be younger than the first of those two terms, for he had all the breadth and vigorous proportions of fully-developed manhood. He could not be well older than the latter, for not a trace of passing years, no wrinkle, no furrow, no greyness of hair, no loss of any youthful grace was apparent. Although covered by a large rough coat, then commonly called a wrap-rascal, of the coarsest materials and the rudest form, there was something in his demeanour and his look which at once denoted the gentleman. His hat, too, his gloves, and his boots, which were the only

other parts of his dress that the loose coat we have mentioned suffered to be seen, were all not only good, but of the best quality. Though his complexion was dark, and his skin bronzed almost to a mahogany colour by exposure to sun and wind, the features were all fine and regular, and the expression high toned, but somewhat grave, and even sad. He seated himself quietly in the corner of the coach, with his back to the horses; and folding his arms upon his broad chest, gazed out of the window with an abstracted look, though his eyes were turned towards a man with a lantern, who was handing something up to the coachman. Thus the old gentleman on the opposite side had a full view of his countenance; and seemed, by the gaze which he fixed upon it, to study it attentively.

The second of the two gentlemen I have mentioned entered immediately after the first, and was about the same age, but broader in make, and not quite so tall. He was dressed in the height of the mode of that day; and though not in uniform, bore about him several traces of military costume, which were, indeed, occasionally affected by the dapper shopmen of that period, when they rode up Rotten Row or walked the Mall, but which harmonized so well with his whole appearance and demeanour, as to leave no doubt of their being justly assumed. His features were not particularly good, but far from ugly, his complexion fair, his hair strong and curly; and he would have passed rather for a handsome man than otherwise, had not a deep scar, as if from a sabre-wound, traversed his right cheek and part of his upper lip. His aspect was gay, lively, and good-humoured, and yet there were some strong lines of thought about his brow, with a slightly sarcastic turn of the muscles round the corner of his mouth and nostrils. On entering, he seated himself opposite the second traveller, but without speaking to him, so that the old gentleman who first tenanted the coach could not tell whether they came together or not; and the moment after they had entered, the door was closed, the clerk of the inn looked at the way-bill, the coachman bestowed two or three strokes of his heavy whip on the flanks of his dull cattle, and the lumbering machine moved heavily out, and rolled away towards Westminster Bridge.

The lights which were under the archway had enabled the travellers to see each other's faces, but when once they had got into the street, the thickness of the air, and the greyness of the dawn, rendered everything indistinct, except the few scattered globe lamps which still remained blinking at the sides of the pavement. The old gentleman sunk back in his corner, wrapped his cloak about him for a nap, and was soon in the land of forgetfulness. His slumbers did not continue very long, however; and when he woke up at the Loompit Hill, he found the sky all rosy with the beams of the rising sun, the country air light and cheerful, and his two companions talking together in familiar tones. After rousing himself, and putting down the window, he passed about five minutes either in contemplating the hedges by the road-side, all glittering in the morning dew, or in considering the faces of his two fellow-travellers, and making up his mind as to their characters and qualities. At the end of that time, as they had now ceased speaking, he said —

“A beautiful day, gentlemen. I was sure it would be so when we set out.”

The darker and the graver traveller made no reply, but the other smiled good-humouredly, and inquired —

“May I ask by what you judged, for to me the morning seemed to promise anything but fine weather?”

“Two things — two things, my dear Sir,” answered the gentleman in black. “An old proverb and a bad almanack.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the other. “I should have thought it a very good almanack if it told me to a certainty what sort of weather it would be.”

“Ay, but how did it tell me?” rejoined the elderly traveller, leaning his hand upon the gold head of his cane. “It declared we should have torrents of rain. Now, Sir, the world is composed of a great mass of fools with a small portion of sensible men, who, like a little quantity of yeast in a large quantity of dough, make the dumpling not quite so bad as it might be. Of all the fools that I ever met with, however, the worst are scientific fools, for they apply themselves to tell all the other fools in the world that of which

they themselves know nothing, or at all events very little, which is worse. I have examined carefully, in the course of a long life, how to deal with these gentry, and I find that if you believe the exact reverse of any information they give you, you will be right nine hundred and ninety-seven times out of a thousand. I made a regular calculation of it some years ago; and although at first sight it would seem that the chances are equal, that these men should be right or wrong, I found the result as I have stated, and have acted upon it ever since in perfect security. If they trusted to mere guess work, the chances might, perhaps, be equal, but they make such laborious endeavours to lead themselves wrong, and so studiously avoid everything that could lead them right, that the proportion is vastly against them."

"If such be their course of proceeding, the result will be naturally as you say," answered the gentleman to whom he spoke; "but I should think that as the variations of the weather must proceed from natural causes constantly recurring, observation and calculation might arrive at some certainty regarding them."

"Hold the sea in the hollow of your hand," cried the old gentleman, impatiently; "make the finite contain the infinite; put twenty thousand gallons into a pint pot, — and when you have done all that, then calculate the causes that produce rain to-day and wind to-morrow, or sunshine one day and clouds the next. Men say the same cause acting under the same circumstances will always produce the same effect — good; I grant that, merely for the sake of argument. But I contend that the same effect may be produced by a thousand causes or more. A man knocks you down; you fall: that's the effect produced by one cause; but a fit of apoplexy may make you fall exactly in the same way. Then apply the cause at the other end if you like, and trip your foot over a stone, or over some bunches of long grass that mischievous boys have tied across the path — down you come, just as if a quarrelsome companion had tapped you on the head. No, no, Sir; the only way of ascertaining what the weather will be from one hour to another is by a barometer. That's not very sure, and the best I know of is a cow's tail, or a piece of dried sea-weed. But these men of science, they do nothing but go out mare's-nest-

ing from morning till night, and a precious number of horses' eggs they have found!"

Thus commenced a conversation which lasted for some time, and in which the younger traveller seemed to find some amusement, plainly perceiving, what the reader has already discovered, that his elderly companion was an oddity. The other tenant of the coach made no observation, but remained with his arms folded on his chest, sometimes looking out of the window, sometimes gazing down at his own knee in deep thought. About ten miles from town, the coach passed some led horses, with the grooms that were conducting them; and, as is natural for young men, both the old gentleman's fellow-travellers put their heads to the window, and examined the animals with a scrutinizing eye.

"Fine creatures, fine creatures — horses!" said the gentleman in black.

"Those are very fine ones," answered the graver of the two young men; "I think I never saw better points about any beast than that black charger."

"Ay, Sir; you are a judge of horse-flesh, I suppose," rejoined the old gentleman; "but I was speaking of horses in the abstract. They are noble creatures indeed; and as matters have fallen out in this world, I can't help thinking that there is a very bad arrangement, and that those at the top of the tree should be a good way down. If all creatures had their rights, man would not be the cock of the walk, as he is now — a feeble, vain, self-sufficient, sensual monkey, who has no farther advantages over other apes than being able to speak and cook his dinner."

"May I ask," inquired the livelier of the two young men, "what is the gentlemanly beast you would put over his head?"

"A great many — a great many," replied the other. "Dogs, horses — elephants, certainly; I think elephants at the top. I am not sure how I would class lions and tigers, who decidedly have one advantage over man, that of being stronger and nobler beasts of prey. He is only at the head of the tribe *Simia*, and should be described by naturalists as the largest, cunningest, and most gluttonous of baboons."

The gay traveller laughed aloud; and even his grave companion

smiled, saying, drily, "On my life, I believe there's some truth in it."

"Truth, Sir!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "It's as true as we are living. How dare man compare himself to a dog? an animal with greater sagacity, stronger affections, infinitely more honour and honesty, a longer memory, and a truer heart. I would not be a man if I could be a dog, I can assure you."

"Many a man leads the life of a dog," said the gay traveller. "I'm sure I have, for the last five or six years."

"If you have led as honest a life, Sir," rejoined the old man, "you may be very proud of it."

What the other would have answered cannot be told, for at that moment the coach stopped to change horses, which was an operation, in those days, occupying about a quarter of an hour, and the whole party got out and went into the little inn to obtain some breakfast; for between London and Folkestone, which was to be the ultimate resting-place of the vehicle, two hours and a half, upon the whole, were consumed with breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. Thus any party of travellers proceeding together throughout the entire journey, had a much better opportunity of becoming thoroughly acquainted with each other than many a man has before marriage with the wife he takes to his bosom.

Though the conversation of the old gentleman was, as the reader has perceived, somewhat morose and misanthropical, he showed himself very polite and courteous at the breakfast table, made the tea, carved the ham, and asked every man if he took cream and sugar. What wonderful things little attentions are — how they smooth down our asperities and soften us to one another! The two younger gentlemen had looked upon their elderly companion merely as that curious compound which we have before mentioned — an oddity, and which, like a pinch of strong snuff, stimulates us without being very pleasant; but now they began to think him a very nice old gentleman; and even the graver of the pair conversed with him almost cheerfully for the short space of time their meal occupied. When they had finished, and paid the score, the whole party walked out together to the front of the house, where they found a poor beggar woman with a child in her

arms. Each gave her something, but the elderly man stopped to inquire farther, and the others walked up and down for a few minutes, till the coachman, who was making himself comfortable by the absorption of his breakfast, and the horses, who were undergoing the opposite process in the application of their harness, at length made their appearance. The two younger gentlemen turned their eyes from time to time, as they walked, to their elderly friend, who seemed to be scolding the poor woman most vehemently. His keen black eyes sparkled, his brow contracted, he spoke with great volubility, and demonstrated somewhat largely with the forefinger of his right hand. What were their internal comments upon this conduct did not appear; but both were a good deal surprised to see him, in the end, put his hand into his breeches pocket, draw forth a piece of money — it was not silver for it was yellow, and it was not copper for it was too bright — and slip it quietly into the poor woman's palm. He next gave a quiet, almost a timid glance around, to see if any one were looking, and then stepped rapidly into the coach, as if he were ashamed of what he had done. During all this proceeding he had taken no notice of his two companions, nor at all listened to what they were talking of; but as they entered the vehicle, while the horses were being put to, the one said to the other, "I think you had better do so, a great deal. It is as well to have the *carte du pays* before once commences operations."

"Well," replied the other, "you take the lead, Edward. The wound is still painful, though it is an old one."

What they were talking of their companion could not tell; but it excited, in some degree, his curiosity; and the manners of his two companions had, to say the truth, pleased him, though he was one of those men who, with very benevolent feelings at the bottom, are but little inclined to acknowledge that they are well pleased with any thing or with any body. For a moment or two all parties were silent; but the elderly gentleman was the first to begin, saying, in a more placable and complimentary tone than he was in general accustomed to use, "I hope I am to have the pleasure of your society, gentlemen, to the end of my journey?"

"I rather think we shall be your companions as far as you go,"

replied the gayer of the two young men, "for we are wending down to the far, wild parts of Kent; and it is probable you will not go beyond Folkestone, unless, indeed, you are about to cross the seas."

"Not I," exclaimed the old gentleman — "I have crossed the seas enough in my day, and never intend to set my foot out of my own country again, till four stout fellows carry me to the churchyard. No, no; you'll journey beyond me, a long way, for I am only going to a little place called Harbourne, some distance on the Sussex side of Folkestone — a place quite out of the world, with no bigger a town near it than Cranbrook, and where we see the face of a human creature above the rank of a farmer, or a smuggler, about once in the year, — always excepting the parson of the parish."

"Then you turn off from Maidstone?" said the graver traveller, looking steadfastly in his face.

"No, I don't," replied the other. "Never, my dear Sir, come to conclusions where you don't know the premises. I go, on the contrary, to Ashford, where I intend to sleep. I am there to be joined by a worthy brother of mine, and then we return together to Cranbrook. You are quite right, indeed, that my best and straightest road would be, as you say, from Maidstone; but we can't always take the straightest road in this world, though young men think they can, and old men only learn too late that they cannot."

"I have good reason to know the fact," said the gayer of his two fellow travellers; "I myself am going to the very same part of the country you mention, but have to proceed still farther out of my way; for I must visit Hythe and Folkestone first."

"Indeed, indeed!" exclaimed their elderly friend. "Do you know any body in that part of Kent? — Have you ever been there before?"

"Never," replied the other; "nor have I ever seen the persons I am going to see. What sort of a country is it?"

"Bless the young man's life!" exclaimed the gentleman in black, "does he expect me to give him a long picturesque description of St. Augustine's Lathe? If you wish to know my opinion of

it, it is as wild and desolate a part of the world as the backwoods of America, and the people little better than American savages. You 'll find plenty of trees, a few villages, some farm-houses, one or two gentlemen's seats — they had better have called them stools — a stream or two, a number of hills and things of that kind; and your humble servant, who would be very happy to see you, if you are not a smuggler, and are coming to that part of the country."

"I shall not fail to pay my respects to you," replied the gentleman to whom he spoke; "but I must first know who I am to inquire for."

"Pay your respect where it is due, my dear Sir," rejoined the other. "You can't tell a whit whether I deserve any respect or not. You 'll find out all that by and by. As to what I am called, I could give you half a dozen names. Some people call me the Bear, some people the Nabob, some the Misanthrope; but my real name — that which I am known by at the post-office — is Mr. Zachary Croyland, brother of the man who has Harbourne House: a younger brother too, by God's blessing — and a great blessing it is."

"It is lucky when every man is pleased with his situation," answered his young acquaintance. "Most elder brothers thank God for making them such, and I have often had cause to do the same."

"It's the greatest misfortune that can happen to a man," exclaimed the old gentleman, eagerly. "What are elder brothers, but people who are placed by fate in the most desperate and difficult circumstances. Spoilt and indulged in their infancy, taught to be vain and idle and conceited from the cradle, deprived of every inducement to the exertion of mind, corrupted by having always their own way, sheltered from all the friendly buffets of the world, and left, like a pond in a gravel pit, to stagnate or evaporate without stirring. Nine times out of ten from mere inanition they fall into every sort of vice; forget that they have duties as well as privileges, think that the slice of the world that has been given to them is entirely at their own pleasure and disposal, spend their fortunes, encumber their estates, bully their wives and their servants, indulge their eldest son till he is just such a piece of un-

kneaded dough as themselves, kick out their younger sons into the world without a farthing, and break their daughters' hearts by forcing them to marry men they hate. That's what elder brothers are made for; and to be one, I say again, is the greatest curse that can fall upon a man. But come, now I have told you my name, tell me yours. That's but a fair exchange you know, and no robbery, and I hate going on calling people 'Sir' for ever."

"Quite a just demand," replied the gentleman whom he addressed, "and you shall immediately have the whole particulars. My name is Digby, a poor major in his Majesty's — regiment of Dragoons, to whom the two serious misfortunes have happened of being born an eldest son, and having a baronetcy thrust upon him."

"Couldn't be worse — couldn't be worse!" replied the old gentleman, laughing. "And so you are Sir Edward Digby! Oh yes, I can tell you, you are expected, and have been so these three weeks. The whole matter's laid out for you in every house in the country. You are to marry every unmarried woman in the hundred. The young men expect you to do nothing but hunt foxes, course hares, and shoot partridges from morning till night; and the old men have made up their minds that you shall drink port, claret, or madeira, as the case may be, from night till morning. I pity you — upon my life, I pity you. What between love and wine and field sports, you'll have a miserable time of it! Take care how you speak a single word to any single woman! Don't even smile upon Aunt Barbara, or she'll make you a low curtsy, and say 'You must ask my brother about the settlement, my dear Edward.' Ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed a long, merry, hearty peal, that made the rumbling vehicle echo again. Then putting the gold-headed cane to his lips, he turned a sly glance upon the other traveller, who was only moved to a very faint smile by all the old gentleman's merriment, asking, "Does this gentleman come with you? — Are you to be made a martyr of too, Sir? Are you to be set running after foxes all day, like a tiger on horseback, and to have sheep's eyes cast at you all the evening, like a man in the pillory pelted with eggs? Are you bound to imbibe a butt of

claret in three weeks? Poor young men — poor young men! My bowels of compassion yearn towards you.”

“I shall fortunately escape all such perils,” replied he whom he had last addressed — “I have no invitation to that part of the country.”

“Come, then, I’ll give you one,” said the old gentleman; “if you like to come and stay a few days with an old bachelor, who will neither make you drunk nor make you foolish, I shall be glad to see you.”

“I am not very likely to get drunk,” answered the other, “as an old wound compels me to be a water drinker. Foolish enough I may be, and may have been; but, I am sure, that evil would not be increased by frequenting your society, my dear Sir.”

“I don’t know — I don’t know, young gentleman,” said Mr. Croyland: “every man has his follies, and I amongst the rest as goodly a bag-full as one could well desire. But you have not given me an answer; shall I see you? Will you come with your friend, and take up your abode at a single man’s house, while Sir Edward goes and charms the ladies?”

“I cannot come with him, I am afraid,” replied the young gentleman, “for I must remain with the regiment some time; but I will willingly accept your invitation, and join him in a week or two.”

“Oh you’re in the same regiment, are you?” asked Mr. Croyland; “it’s not a whole regiment of elder sons, I hope?”

“Oh no,” answered the other, “I have the still greater misfortune of being an only son; and the greater one still, of being an orphan.”

“And may I know your style and denomination?” said Mr. Croyland.

“Oh, Osborn, Osborn!” cried Sir Edward Digby, before his friend could speak, “Captain Osborn of the — Dragoons.”

“I will put that down in my note-book,” rejoined the old gentleman. “The best friend I ever had was named Osborn. He couldn’t be your father, though, for he had no children, poor fellow! and was never married, which was the only blessing Heaven ever granted him, except a good heart and a well-regulated

mind. His sister married my old schoolfellow, Layton — but that's a bad story, and a sad story, though now it's an old story, too."

"Indeed!" said Sir Edward Digby; "I'm fond of old stories if they are good ones."

"But, I told you this was a bad one, Sir Ned," rejoined the old gentleman sharply; "and as my brother behaved very ill to poor Layton, the less we say of it the better. The truth is," he continued, for he was one of those who always refuse to tell a story, and tell it after all, "Layton was rector of a living which was in my brother's gift. He was only to hold it, however, till my youngest nephew was of age to take it; but when the boy died — as they both did sooner or later — Layton held the living on, and thought it was his own, till one day there came a quarrel between him and my brother, and then Robert brought forward his letter promising to resign when called upon, and drove him out. I wasn't here then; but I have heard all about it since, and a bad affair it was. It should not have happened if I had been here, for Bob has a shrewd eye to the nabob's money, as well he may, seeing that he's — but that's no business of mine. If he chooses to dribble through his fortune, Heaven knows how, I've nothing to do with it! The two poor girls will suffer."

"What, your brother has two fair daughters then, has he?" demanded Sir Edward Digby. "I suppose it is under the artillery of their glances I am first to pass; for, doubtless, you know I am going to your brother's."

"Oh, yes, I know — I know all about it!" replied Mr. Croyland. "They tell me everything as in duty bound — that's to say, everything they don't wish to conceal. But I'm consulted like an oracle upon all things unimportant; for he that was kicked out with a sixpence into the wide world, has grown a wonderful great man since the sixpence has multiplied itself. As to your having to pass under the artillery of the girls' glances, however, you must take care of yourself; for you might stand a less dangerous fire, I can tell you, even in a field of battle. But I'll give you one warning for your safe-guard. You may make love to little Zara as long as you like — think of the fools calling her Zara! Though she'll play

a pretty game of picquet with you, you may chance to win it; but you must not dangle after Edith, or you will burn your fingers. She 'll not have you, if you were twenty baronets, and twenty majors of Dragoons into the bargain. She has got some of the fancies of the old uncle about her, and is determined to die an old maid, I can see."

"Oh, the difficulty of the enterprise would only be a soldier's reason for undertaking it!" said Sir Edward Digby.

"It won't do — it won't do;" answered Mr. Croyland, laughing; "you may think yourself very captivating, very conquering, quite a look-and-die man, as all you people in red jackets fancy yourselves, but it will be all lost labour with Edith, I can tell you."

"You excite all the martial ardour in my soul!" exclaimed Digby, with a gay smile; "and if she be not forty, hump-backed, or one eyed, by the fates you shall see what you shall see."

"Forty!" cried Mr. Croyland; "why she's but two-and-twenty, man! — a great deal straighter than that crouching wench in white marble they call the 'Venus de Medici,' and with a pair of eyes, that, on my life, I think would have made me forswear celibacy, if I had found such looking at me, any time before I reached fifty!"

"Do you hear that, Osborn?" cried Sir Edward Digby. "Here's a fine field for an adventurous spirit. I shall have the start of you, my friend; and in the wilds of Kent, what may not be done in ten days or a fortnight?"

His companion only answered by a melancholy smile; and the conversation went on between the old gentleman and the young baronet till they reached the small town of Lenham, where they stopped again to dine. There, however, Mr. Croyland drew Sir Edward Digby aside, and inquired in a low tone, "Is your friend in love? — He looks mighty melancholy."

"I believe he is," replied Digby. "Love's the only thing that can make a man melancholy; and when one comes to consider all the attractions of a squaw of the Chippeway Indians, it is no wonder that my friend is in such a hopeless case."

The old gentleman poked him with his finger, and shook his head with a laugh, saying — "You are a wag, young gentleman —

you are a wag; but it would be a great deal more reasonable, let me tell you, to fall in love with a Chippeway squaw, in her feathers and wampam, than with one of these made-up madams, all paint and satin, and tawdry bits of embroidery. In the one case you might know something of what your love is like; in the other, I defy you to know anything about her; and, nine times out of ten, what a man marries is little better than a bale of tow and whalebone, covered over with the excrement of a silkworm. Man's a strange animal; and one of the strangest of all his proceedings is, that of covering up his own natural skin with all manner of contrivances derived from every bird, beast, fish, and vegetable, that happens to come in his way. If he wants warmth, he goes and robs a sheep of its great coat; he beats the unfortunate grass of the field, till he leaves nothing but shreds, to make himself a shirt; he skins a beaver, to cover his head; and, if he wants to be exceedingly fine, he pulls the tail of an ostrich, and sticks the feather in his hat. He's the universal mountebank, depend upon it, playing his antics for the amusement of creation, and leaving nothing half so ridiculous as himself."

Thus saying, he turned round again, and joined Captain Osborn, in whom, perhaps, he took a greater interest than even in his livelier companion. It might be that the associations called up by the name were pleasant to him, or it might be that there was something in his face that interested him, for certainly that face was one which seemed to become each moment more handsome as one grew familiar with it.

When, after dinner, they re-entered the vehicle, and rolled away once more along the high road, Captain Osborn took a greater share in the conversation than he had previously done; and remarking that Mr. Croyland had put, as a condition, upon his invitation to Sir Edward, that he should not be a smuggler, he went on to observe, "You seem to have a great objection to those gentry, my dear Sir; and yet I understand your county is full of them."

"Full of them!" exclaimed Mr. Croyland — "it is running over with them. They drop down into Sussex, out into Essex, over into Surrey; the vermin are more numerous than rats in an old barn. Not that, when a fellow is poor, and wants money, and can

get it by no other means, — not that I think very hard of him when he takes to a life of risk and adventure, where his neck is not worth sixpence, and his gain is bought by the sweat of his brow. But your gentleman smuggler is my abomination — your fellow that risks little but an exchequer process, and gains ten times what the others do, without their labour or their danger. Give me your bold, brave fellow, who declares war and fights it out. There's some spirit in him."

"Gentlemen smugglers!" said Osborn; "that seems to me to be a strange sort of anomaly. I was not aware that there were such things."

"Pooh! the country is full of them," cried Mr. Croyland. "It is not here that the peasant treads upon the kybe of the peer; but the smuggler treads upon the country gentlemen. Many a merchant who never made a hundred pounds by fair trade, makes thousands and hundreds of thousands by cheating the Customs. There is not a man in this part of the country who does not dabble in the traffic more or less. I've no doubt all my brandied cherries are steeped in stuff that never paid duty; and if you don't smuggle yourself, your servants do it for you. But I'll tell you all about it," and he proceeded to give them a true and faithful exposition of the state of the county, agreeing in all respects with that which has been furnished to the reader in the first chapter of this tale.

His statement and the various conversation, which arose from different parts of it, occupied the time fully, till the coach, as it was growing dark, rolled into Ashford. There Mr. Croyland quitted his two companions, shaking them each by the hand with right good will; and they pursued their onward course to Hythe and Folkestone, without any farther incident worthy of notice.

CHAPTER III.

AT Hythe, to make use of a very extraordinary though not uncommon expression, the coach stopped to sup — not that the coach itself ate anything, for, on the contrary, it disgorged that which it had already taken in; but the travellers who descended from it were furnished with supper, although the distance to

Folkestone might very well have justified them in going on to the end of their journey without any other pabulum than that which they had already received. But two or three things are to be taken into consideration. The distance from London to Folkestone is now seventy-one miles. It was longer in those days by several more, besides having the disadvantage of running up and down over innumerable hills, all of which were a great deal more steep than they are in the present day. The journey, which the travellers accomplished, was generally considered a feat both of difficulty and danger, and the coach which performed that feat in one day, was supposed to deserve right well the name which it had assumed, of "The Phenomenon." Before it began to run, seventy-one miles in seventeen hours was considered an impracticable journey for anything but a man on horseback, and when first the coach appeared upon the road, the towns-people and villagers turned out in multitudes, with admiration and wonder, not unmixed with dread, to see the rapid rate at which it went — very nearly six miles an hour! The old diligence, which had preceded it, had slept one night, and sometimes two, upon the road; and, in its first vain struggles with its more rapid successor, it had actually once or twice made the journey in two-and-twenty hours. To beat off this pertinacious rival, the proprietor of the stage had been obliged to propitiate the inn-keepers of various important towns, by dividing his favours amongst them; and thus the traveller was forced to wait nearly one hour at Hythe, during which he might sup if he liked, although he was only about five miles from Folkestone.

The supper room of the inn was vacant when the two officers of Dragoons entered, but the table, covered with its neat white cloth, and all the preparations for a substantial meal, together with a bright fire sparkling in the grate, rendered its aspect cheerful and reviving after a long and tedious journey, such as that which had just been accomplished. Sir Edward Digby looked round well pleased, turned his back to the fire, spoke to the landlord and his maid about supper, and seemed disposed to enjoy himself during the period of his stay. He ordered, too, a pint of claret, which he was well aware was likely to be procured in great perfection

upon the coast of Kent. The landlord in consequence conceived a high respect for him, and very much undervalued all the qualities of his companion, who, seating himself at the table, leaned his head upon his hand, and fell into deep thought, without giving orders for anything. The host, with his attendant star, disappeared from the room to procure the requisites for the travellers meal, and Sir Edward Digby immediately took advantage of their absence to say, "Come, come, my dear Colonel, shake this off. I think all that we have lately heard should have tended to revive hope, and to give comfort. During all the six years that we have been more like brothers than friends, I have never seen you so much cast down as now, when you are taking the field under the most favourable circumstances, with name, station, reputation, fortune, and with the best reason to believe those true whom you had been taught to suppose false."

"I cannot tell, Digby," replied his companion; "we shall hear more ere long, and doubt is always well nigh as painful as the worst certainty. Besides, I am returning to the scenes of my early youth — scenes stored, it is true, with many a sweet and happy memory, but full also of painful recollections. Those memories themselves are but as an inscription on a tomb, where hopes and pleasures, the bright dreams of youth, the ardent aspirations of first true love, the sweet endearments of a happy home, the treasured caresses of the best of mothers, the counsels, the kindness, the unvarying tenderness of the noblest and highest minded of fathers, all lie buried. There may be a pleasure in visiting that tomb, but it is a melancholy one; and when I think that it was for me — that it was on my account, my father suffered persecution and wrong, till a powerful mind, and a vigorous frame gave way, there is a bitterness mingled with all my remembrances of these scenes, from which I would fain clear my heart. I will do so, too, but it will require some solitary thought, some renewed familiarity with all the objects round, to take off the sharpness of the first effect. You, go on to Folkestone and see that all is right there, I will remain here and wait for the rest. As soon as you have ascertained that everything is prepared to act in case we are called upon — which I hope may not be the case, as I

do not like the service — you may betake yourself to Harbourne House, making me a report as you pass. When I have so distributed the men that we can rapidly concentrate a sufficient number upon any spot where they may be required, I will come on after you to our good old friend's dwelling. There you can see me, and let me know what is taking place."

"I think you had better not let him know who you really are," replied Sir Edward Digby, "at least till we have seen how the land lies."

"I do not know — I will think of it," answered the other gentleman, whom for the present we shall continue to call Osborn, though the learned reader has already discovered that such was not his true name. "It is evident," he continued, "that old Mr. Croyland does not remember me, although I saw him frequently when he was in England for a short time, some six or seven years before he finally quitted India. However, though I feel I am much changed, it is probable that many persons will recognise me whenever I appear in the neighbourhood of Cranbrook, and he might take it ill, that he who was so good and true a friend both to my uncle and my father, should be left in ignorance. Perhaps it would be better to confide in him fully, and make him aware of all my views and purposes."

"Under the seal of confession, then," said his friend; "for he is evidently a very talkative old gentleman. Did you remark how he once or twice declared he would not tell a story, that it was no business of his, and then went on to tell it directly?"

"True, such was always his habit," answered Osborn; "and his oddities have got somewhat exaggerated during the last twelve years; but he's as true and faithful as ever man was, and nothing would induce him to betray a secret confided to him."

"You know best," replied the other; but the entrance of the landlord with the claret, and the maid with the supper, broke off the conversation, and there was no opportunity of renewing it till it was announced that the horses were to, and the coach was ready. The two friends then took leave of each other, both coachman and host being somewhat surprised to find that one of the travellers was about to remain behind.

When, however, a portmanteau, a sword-case, and a large trunk, or mail as it was then called, had been handed out of the egregious boot, Osborn walked into the inn once more, and called the landlord to him. "I shall, most likely," he said, "take up my quarters with you for some days, so you will be good enough to have a bed-room prepared for me. You must also let me have a room, however small, where I can read, and write, and receive any persons who may come to see me, for I have a good deal of business to transact."

"Oh, yes, Sir — I understand," replied the host, with a knowing elevation of one eye-brow and a depression of the other, "Quite snug and private. You shall have a room at the back of the house with two doors, so that they can come in by the one, and go out through the other, and nobody know anything about it."

"I rather suspect you mistake," answered the guest, with a smile, "and for fear you should say anything, under an error, that you might be sorry for afterwards, let me tell you at once that I am an officer of Dragoons, and that the business I speak of is merely regimental business."

The host's face grew amazingly blank; for a smuggler in a large way was, in his estimation, a much more valuable and important guest than an officer in the army, even had he been Commander-in-Chief of the forces; but Osborn proceeded to relieve his mind from some of its anxieties by saying: "You will understand that I am neither a spy nor an informer, my good friend, but merely come here to execute whatever orders I may receive from government as a military man. I tell you who I am at once, that you may, as far as possible, keep from my sight any of those little transactions which I am informed are constantly taking place on this coast. I shall not, of course, step over the line of my duty, which is purely military, to report anything I see; but still I should not like that any man should say I was cognizant of proceedings contrary to the interests of the government. This hint, however, I doubt not, will be enough."

"Sir, you are a gentleman," said the host, "and as a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, I shall take care you have no annoyance. You must wait a little for your bed-room though, for

we did not know you were going to stay; but we will lose no time getting it ready. Can I do anything else to serve you, Sir?"

"I think not," replied Osborn. "But one thing will be necessary. I expect five horses down to-morrow, and there must be found stabling for them, and accommodation for the servants."

The landlord, who was greatly consoled by these latter proofs of his guest's opulence and importance, was proceeding to assure him that all manner of conveniences, both for horse and man were to be found at his inn, when the door of the room opened, and a third person was added to the party within. The moment the eye of the traveller by the coach fell upon him, his face lighted up with a well pleased smile, and he exclaimed, "Ah, my good friend, is that you? — I little expected to find you in this part of Kent. What brought you hither, after our long voyage?"

"The same that brought you," answered the other: "old memories and loved associations."

But before we proceed to notice what was Osborn's reply, we must, though very unwilling to give long descriptions either of personal appearance or of dress, pause to notice briefly those of the stranger who had just entered.

He had originally been a tall man, and probably a powerful one, but he now stooped considerably, and was extremely thin. His face had no colour in it, and even the lips were pale, but yet the hue was not cadaverous, or even what could be called sickly. The features were generally small and fine, except the eyes, which were large and bright, with a sort of brilliant but unsafe fire in them, and that peculiar searching and intense gaze when speaking to any one, which is common to people of strong imaginations, who try to convey to others more than they actually say. His forehead, too, was high and grand, but wrinkled over with the furrows of thought and care; and on the right side was a deep indentation, with a gash across it, as if the skull had been driven in by a blow. His hair, which was long and thin, was milk white, and though his teeth were fine, yet the wrinkles of his skin, the peculiar roughness of the ear, and the shrivelled hand, all bore testimony of an advanced age. Yet, perhaps, he might be younger than he looked, for the light in that eager eye plainly spoke one of

those quick, anxious, ever labouring spirits which wear the frame by the internal emotions, infinitely more rapidly and more destructively than any of the external events and circumstances of life. One thing was very peculiar about him — at least, in this country — for on another continent such a peculiarity might have called for no attention. On either cheek, beginning just behind the external corner of the eye, and proceeding in a graceful wave all along the cheek bone, turning round, like an acanthus leaf, at the other extremity upon the cheek itself, was a long line of very minute blue spots, with another, and another, and another beneath it, till the whole assumed the appearance of a rather broad arabesque painted in blue upon his face. His dress in other respects (if this tattooing might be called a part of his dress) though coarse in texture was good. The whole, too, was black, except where the white turned-down collar of his shirt appeared between his coat and his pale brownish skin. His shoes were large and heavy like those used by the countrymen in that part of the county, and in them he wore a pair of silver buckles, not very large, but which in their peculiar form and ornaments, gave signs of considerable antiquity. Though bent, as we have said, thin, and pale, he seemed active and energetic. All his motions were quick and eager, and he grasped the hand which Osborn extended to him, with a warmth and enthusiasm very different from the ordinary expression of common friendship.

“You mistake,” said the young gentleman, in answer to his last observation. “It was not old memories and loved associations which brought me here at all, Mr. Warde. It was an order from the commander-in-chief. Had I not received it, I should not have visited this place for years — if ever!”

“Yes, yes, you would,” replied the old man; “you could not help yourself. It was written in the book of your fate. It was not to be avoided. You were drawn here by an irresistible impulse to undergo what you have to undergo, to perform that which is assigned you, and to do and suffer all those things which are written on high.”

“I wonder to hear *you* speaking in terms so like those of a fatalist,” answered Osborn — “you whom I have always heard so

strenuously assert man's responsibility for all his actions, and scoff at the idea of his excusing himself on the plea of his predestination."

"True, true," answered the old man whom he called Warde, — "predestination affords him no excuse for aught that is wrong, for though it be an inscrutable mystery how those three great facts are to be reconciled, yet certain it is that Omniscience cannot be ignorant of that which will take place, any more than of that which has taken place; that everything which God foreknows, must take place, and has been pre-determined by his will, and that yet — as every man must feel within himself — his own actions depend upon his volition, and if they be evil he alone is to blame. The end is to come, Osborn — the end is to come when all will be revealed — and doubt not that it will be for God's glory. I often think," he continued in a less emphatic tone, "that man with his free will is like a child with a plaything. We see the babe about to dash it against the wall in mere wantonness, we know that he will injure it — perhaps break it to pieces — perhaps hurt himself with it in a degree; we could prevent it, yet we do not, thinking perhaps that it will be a lesson — one of those, the accumulation of which makes experience, if not wisdom. At all events the punishment falls upon him; and, if duly warned, he has no right to blame us for that which his own will did, though we saw what he would do, and could have prevented him from doing so. We are all spoilt children, Osborn, and remain so to the end, though God gives us warning enough, — but here comes my homely meal."

At the same moment the landlord brought in a dish of vegetables, some milk and some pottage, which he placed upon the table, giving a shrewd look to the young officer, but saying to his companion, "There, I have brought what you ordered, Sir; but I cannot help thinking you had better take a bit of meat. You had nothing but the same stuff this morning, and no dinner that I know of."

"Man, I never eat anything that has drawn the breath of life," replied Warde. "The first of our race brought death into the world and was permitted to inflict it upon others, for the satis-

faction of his own appetites; but it was a permission, and not an injunction — except for sacrifice. I will not be one of the tyrants of the whole creation; I will have no more of the tiger in my nature than is inseparable from it; and as to gorging myself some five or six times a day with unnecessary food — am I a swine, do you think, to eat when I am not hungry, for the sole purpose of devouring? No, no, the simplest food, and that only for necessity, is best for man's body and his mind. We all grow too rank and superfluous."

Thus saying, he approached the table, said a short grace over that which was set before him, and then sitting down, ate till he was satisfied, without exchanging a word with any one during the time that he was thus engaged. It occupied less than five minutes, however, to take all that he required, and then starting up suddenly, he thanked God for what he had given him, took up his hat and turned towards the door.

"I am going out, Osborn," he said, "for my evening walk. Will you come with me?"

"Willingly for half an hour," answered the young officer, and, telling the landlord as he passed that he would be back by the time that his room was ready, he accompanied his eccentric acquaintance out into the streets of Hythe, and thence, through some narrow walks and lanes, to the sea-shore.

CHAPTER IV.

THE sky was clear and bright; the moonlight was sleeping in dream-like splendour upon the water, and the small waves, thrown up by the tide more than the wind, came rippling along the beach like a flood of diamonds. All was still and silent in the sky, and upon the earth; and the soft rustle of the waters upon the shore seemed but to say "Hush!" as if nature feared that any louder sound should interrupt her calm repose. To the west, stretched out the faint low line of coast towards Dungeness; and to the east, appeared the high cliffs near Folkestone and Dover — grey and solemn; while the open heaven above looked down with its tiny stars and lustrous moon upon the wide extended sea,

glittering in the silver veil cast over her sleeping bosom from on high.

Such was the scene presented to the eyes of the two wanderers when they reached the beach, a little way on the Sandgate side of Hythe, and both paused to gaze upon it for several minutes in profound silence.

"This is indeed a night to walk forth upon the sands," said the young officer at length. "It seems to me, that of all the many scenes from which man can derive both instruction and comfort, in the difficulties and troubles of life, there is none so elevating, so strengthening, as that presented by the sea shore on a moonlight night. To behold that mighty element, so full of destructive and of beneficial power, lying tranquilly within the bound which God affixed to it, and to remember the words, 'Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stopped,' affords so grand an illustration of his might, so fine a proof of the truth of his promises, that the heart must be hard indeed and the mind dull, not to receive confirmation of faith, and encouragement in hope."

"More, far more, may man receive," replied his companion, "if he be but willing; but that gross and corrupt insect refuses all instruction, and though the whole universe holds out blessings, still chooses the curse. Where is there a scene whence man may not receive benefit? What spot upon the whole earth has not something to speak to his heart, if he would but listen? In his own busy passions, however, and in his own fierce contentions, in his sordid creeping after gain, in his trickery and his knavery, even in his loves and pleasures, man turns a deaf ear to the great voice speaking to him; and the only scene of all this earth which cannot benefit the eye that looks upon it, is that in which human beings are the chief actors. There all is foulness, or pitifulness, or vice; and one, to live in happiness, and to take the moral of all nature to his heart, should live alone with nature. I will find me out such a place, where I can absent myself entirely, and contemplate nought but the works of God without the presence of man, for I am sick to death of all that I have seen of him and his, especially in what is called a civilized state."

“You have often threatened to do so, Warde,” answered the young officer, “but yet methinks, though you rail at him, you love man too much to quit his abodes entirely. I have seen you kind and considerate to savages of the most horrible class; to men whose daily practice it is to torture with the most unheard of cruelty the prisoners whom they take in battle; and will you have less regard for other fellow-creatures, because they are what you call civilized?”

“The savage is at least sincere,” replied his companion. “The want of sincerity is the great and crowning vice of all this portion of the globe. Cruel the wild hunters may be, but are they more cruel than the people here? Which is the worst torment, a few hours’ agony at the stake, singing the war-song, all ended by a blow of a hatchet, or long years of mental torture, when every scorn and contumely, every bitter injustice, every cruel bereavement that man can inflict or suffer, is piled upon your head, till the load becomes intolerable. Then, too, it is done in a smooth and smiling guise. The civilized fiend looks softly upon you while he wounds you to the heart — makes a pretext of law, and justice, and equity — would have you fancy him a soft good man, while there is no act of malevolence and iniquity that he does not practise. The savage is true, at all events. The man who fractured my skull with a blow of his tomahawk, made no pretence of friendship or of right. He did it boldly, as an act customary with his people, and would have led me to the stake and danced with joy to see me suffering, had I not been rescued. He was sincere at least: but how would the Englishman have served me? He would have wrung my heart with pangs insupportable, and all the time have talked of his great grief to afflict me, of the necessity of the case, of justice being on his side, and of a thousand other vain and idle pretexts, but aggravating the act by mocking me with a show of generosity.”

“I fear my excellent friend that you have at some time suffered sadly from man’s baseness,” said Osborn; “but yet I think you are wrong to let the memory thereof affect you thus. I, too, have suffered, and perhaps shall have to suffer more; but yet I would

not part with the best blessings God has given to man, as you have done, for any other good."

"What have I parted with that I could keep?" asked the other, sharply: "what blessings? I know of none!"

"Trust — confidence," replied his young companion. "I know you will say that they have been taken from you; that you have not thrown them away, that you have been robbed of them. But have you not parted with them too easily? Have you not yielded at once, without a struggle to retain what I still call the best blessings of God? There are many villains in the world — I know it but too well; there are many knaves. There are still more cold and selfish egotists, who, without committing actual crimes or injuring others, do good to none; but there are also many true and upright hearts, many just, noble, and generous men; and were it a delusion to think so, I would try to retain it still."

"And suffer for it in the hour of need, in the moment of the deepest confidence," answered Warde. "If you must have confidence, place it in the humble and the low, in the rudest and least civilized — ay, in the very outcasts of society — rather than in the polished and the courtly, the great and high. I would rather trust my life, or my purse, to the honour of the common robber, and to his generosity, than to the very gentlemanly man of fashion and high station. Now, if, as you say, you have not come down hither for old associations, you must be sent to hunt down honest men than those who sent you — men who break boldly through an unjust and barbarous system, which denies to our land the goods of another, and who, knowing that the very knaves who devised that system, did it but to enrich themselves, stop with a strong hand a part of the plunder on the way — or, rather, insist at the peril of their lives, on man's inherent right to trade with his neighbours, and frustrate the roguish devices of those who would forbid to our land the use of that produced by another."

Osborn smiled at his companion's defence of smuggling, but replied, "I can conceive a thousand reasons, my good friend, why the trade in certain things should be totally prohibited, and a high duty for the interests of the state be placed on others. But I am not going to argue with you on all our institutions; merely

this I will say, that when we entrust to certain men the power of making laws, we are bound to obey those laws when they are made; and it were but candid and just to suppose that those who had made them, after long deliberation, did so for the general good of the whole."

"For their own villanous ends," answered Warde — "for their own selfish interests. The good of the whole! — what is it in the eyes of any of these law-givers but the good of a party?"

"But do you not think," asked the young officer, "that we ourselves, who are not law-givers, judge their actions but too often under the influence of the very motives we attribute to them? Has party no share in our own bosoms? Has selfishness — have views of our own interests, in opposition either to the interests of others or the general weal, no part in the judgment that we form? Each man carps at that which suits him not, and strives to change it, without the slightest care whether, in so doing, he be not bringing ruin on the heads of thousands. But as to what you said just now of my being sent hither to hunt down the smuggler, such is not the case. I am sent to lend my aid to the civil power when called upon to do so — but nothing more; and we all know that the civil power has proved quite ineffective in stopping a system, which began by violation of a fiscal law, and has gone on to outrages the most brutal, and the most daring. I shall not step beyond the line of my duty, my good friend; and I will admit that many of these very misguided men themselves, who are carrying on an illegal traffic in this daring manner, fancy themselves justified by such arguments as you have just now used — nay, more, I do believe that there are some men amongst them of high and noble feelings, who never dream that they are dishonest in breaking a law that they dislike. But if we break one law thus, why should we keep any? — why not add robbery and murder if it suits us?"

"Ay, there *are* high minded and noble men amongst them," answered Warde, not seeming to heed the latter part of what his companion said, "and there stands one of them. He has evil in him doubtless; for he is a man and an Englishman; but I have found none here who has less, and many who have more. Yet

were that man taken in pursuing his occupation, they would imprison, exile, perhaps hang him, while a multitude of knaves in gilded coats, would be suffered to go on committing every sin, and almost every crime, unpunished — a good man, an excellent man, and yet a smuggler.”

The young officer knew it was in vain to reason with him, for in the frequent intercourse they had held together, he had perceived that, with many generous and noble feelings, with a pure heart, and almost ascetic severity of life, there was a certain perversity in the course of Mr. Warde's thoughts, which rendered it impossible to turn them from the direction which they naturally took. It seemed as if by long habit they had channelled for themselves so deep a bed, that they could never be diverted thence; and consequently, without replying at first, he merely turned his eyes in the direction which the other pointed out, trying to catch sight of the person of whom he spoke. They were now on the low sandy shore which runs along between the town of Hythe and the beautiful little watering place of Sandgate. But it must be recollected, that at the time I speak of, the latter place displayed no ornamental villas, no gardens full of flowers, almost touching on the sea, and consisted merely of a few fishermen's, or rather smugglers', huts, with one little public house, and a low-browed shop, filled with all the necessities that the inhabitants might require. Thus nothing like the mass of buildings which the watering place now can boast, lay between them and the Folkestone cliffs; and the whole line of the coast, except at one point, where the roof of a house intercepted the view, was open before Osborn's eyes; yet neither upon the shore itself, nor upon the green upland, which was broken by rocks and bushes, and covered by thick dry grass, could he perceive anything resembling a human form. A minute after, however, he thought he saw something move against the rugged background, and the next moment, the head and shoulders of a man rising over the edge of the hill caught his eyes, and as his companion walked forward in silence, he inquired,

“Have you known him long, or is this one of your sudden judgments, my good friend?”

“I knew him when he was a boy and a lad,” answered Wilmot,

"I know him now that he is a man — so it is no sudden judgment. Come, let us speak with him, Osborn," and he advanced rapidly, by a narrow path, up the side of the slope.

Osborn paused a single instant, and then followed, saying, "Be upon your guard, Warde; and remember how I am circumstanced. Neither commit me nor let him commit himself."

"No, no, fear not," answered his friend, "I am no smuggler, young man;" and he strode on before, without pausing for further consultation. As they climbed the hill, the figure of the man of whom they had been speaking became more and more distinct, while walking up and down upon a flat space at the top of the first step or wave of ground; he seemed to take no notice of their approach. When they came nearer still, he paused, as if waiting for their coming; and the moon shining full upon him, displayed his powerful form, standing in an attitude of easy grace, with the arms folded on the chest, and the head slightly bent forward. He was not above the middle height; but broad in the shoulders, and long in the arms; robust and strong—every muscle was round and swelling, and yet not heavy; for there was the appearance of great lightness and activity in his whole figure, strangely combined with that of vigour and power. His head was small, and well set upon his shoulders; and the very position in which he stood, the firm planting of his feet on the ground, the motionless crossing of his arm upon his breast, all seemed to argue to the mind of Osborn — and he was one not unaccustomed to judge of character by external signs — a strong and determined spirit, well fitted for the rough and adventurous life which he had undertaken.

"Good night, Harding," said Mr. Warde, as they came up to the spot where he stood. "What a beautiful evening it is!"

"Good night, Sir," answered the man, in a civil tone, and with a voice of considerable melody. "It is indeed a beautiful evening, though sometimes I like to see the cloudy sky, too."

"And yet I dare say you enjoy a walk by the bright sea, in the calm moonlight, as much as I do," rejoined Mr. Warde.

"Ay, that I do, Sir," replied the smuggler. "That's what brought me out to-night, for there's nothing else doing; but I should not rest quiet, I suppose, in my bed, if I did not take my

stroll along the downs or somewhere, and look over the sea, while she lies panting in the moonbeams. She's a pretty creature, and I love her dearly. I wonder how people can live inland."

"Oh, there are beautiful scenes enough inland," said Osborn, joining in the conversation; "both wild and grand, and calm and peaceful."

"I know there are, Sir, I know there are," answered the smuggler, gazing at him attentively, "and if ever I were to live away from the beach, I should say, give me the wild and grand, for I have seen many a beautiful place inland, especially in Wales; but still it always seems to me as if there was something wanting when the sea is not there. I suppose it is natural for an Englishman."

"Perhaps it is," rejoined Osborn, "for certainly when Nature rolled the ocean round us, she intended us for a maritime people. But to return to what you were saying, if I could choose my own abode, it should be amongst the calm and peaceful scenes, of which the eye never tires, and amongst which the mind rests in repose."

"Ay, if it is repose one is seeking," replied the smuggler, with a laugh, "well and good. Then a pleasant little valley, with trees and a running stream, and a neat little church, and the parsonage, may do well enough. But I dare say you and I, Sir, have led very different lives, and so have got different likings. I have always been accustomed to the storm and the gale, to a somewhat adventurous life, and to have that great wide sea before my eyes for ever. You, I dare say, have been going on quietly and peacefully all your days, perhaps in London, or in some great town, knowing nothing of hardships or of dangers; so that is the reason you love quiet places."

"Quite the reverse!" answered Osborn, with a smile—"mine has been nothing but a life of peril and danger, and activity, as far as it hitherto has gone. From the time I was eighteen till now, the battle and the skirmish, the march and the retreat, with often the hard ground for my bed, as frequently the sky for my covering, and at best a thin piece of canvas to keep off the blast, have been my lot, but it is that very fact that makes me long for some repose,

and love scenes that give the picture of it to the imagination, if not the reality to the heart. I should suppose that few men who have passed their time thus, and known from youth to manhood nothing but strife and hourly peril, do not sooner or later desire such tranquillity."

"I don't know, Sir," said the smuggler; "it may be so, and the time may come with me; but yet I think habits one is bred to, get such a hold of the heart that we can't do without them. I often fancy I should like a month's quiet, too; but then I know before the month was out I should long to be on the sea again."

"Man is a discontented creature," said Warde, — "not even the bounty of God can satisfy him. I do not believe that he would even rest in heaven, were he not wearied of change by the events of this life. Well may they say it is a state of trial."

"I hope I shall go to heaven, too," rejoined the smuggler; "but I should like a few trips first; and I dare say, when I grow an old man, and stiff and rusty, I shall be well contented to take my walk here in the sunshine, and talk of days that are gone; but at present, when one has life and strength, I could no more sit and get cankered in idleness than I could turn miller. This world's not a place to be still in; and I say, Blow wind, and push off the boat."

"But one may have activity enough without constant excitement and peril," answered Osborn.

"I don't know that there would be half the pleasure in it," replied the smuggler, laughing — "that we strive for, that we love. Everything must have its price, and cheap got is little valued. But who is this coming?" he continued, turning sharply round before either of his companions heard a sound.

The next moment, however, steps running up the face of the bank were distinguished, and in another minute a boy of twelve or thirteen, dressed in a sailor's jacket, came hurrying up to the smuggler, and pulled his sleeve, saying, in a low voice, "Come hither — come hither; I want to speak to you."

The man took a step apart, and bending down his head listened to something which the boy whispered in his ear. "I will come — I will come directly," he said, at length, when the lad was done. "Run on and tell him, little Starlight; for I must get home first

for a minute. "Good night, gentlemen," he continued, turning to Mr. Warde and his companion, "I must go away for a longer walk;" and, without farther adieu, he began to descend the bank, leaving the two friends to take their way back to Hythe, conversing, as they went, much in the same strain as that in which they had indulged while coming thither, differing in almost every topic, but yet with some undefinable link of sympathy between them, which nevertheless owed its origin, in the old man's breast, to very different feelings from those which were experienced by his younger companion.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was an old house, built in a style which acquired the mint-mark of fashion of about the reign of George the First, and was considered by those of the English, or opposite party, to be peculiarly well qualified for the habitation of Hanover rats. It stood at a little distance from the then small hamlet of Harbourne, and was plunged into one of the southern apertures of the wood of that name, having its gardens and pleasure-grounds around it, with a terrace and a lawn stretching out to the verge of a small parish road, which passed at the distance of somewhat less than a quarter of a mile from the windows. It was all of red brick, and looked square and formal enough, with the two wings projecting like the a-kimbo arms of some untamed virago, straight and resolute as a redoubt. The numerous windows, however, with very tolerable spaces between them; the numerous chimneys, with every sort of form and angle; the numerous doors, of every shape and size, and the square precision of the whole, bespoke it a very capacious building, and the inside justified fully the idea which the mind of a traveller naturally formed from the outside. It was, in truth, a roomy, and in some cases a very convenient abode; but it was laid out upon a particular plan, which it may not be amiss to write down, for the practical instruction of the reader unlearned in such edifices.

In the centre of the ground-floor was a large hall of a cruciform shape, each of the limbs being about fifteen feet wide. The two shorter arms of the cross stretched from side to side of the build-

ing in its width; the two longer from end to end of its length. The southern termination of the shorter arms was the great hall-door; the northern arm, which formed the passage between the various ranges of offices, extended to a door at the back, opening into a court-yard surrounded by coach-houses, stables, cow-sheds, pig-sties, and hen-roosts. But the offices, and the passage between them, were shut off from the main hall and the rest of the mansion by double doors; and the square of fifteen feet in the centre of the hall was, to the extent of about two-thirds of the whole, occupied by a large, low-stepped, broad-ballustraded oaken staircase. The eastern and western limbs of the cross afforded the means of communicating with various rooms, — such as library, dining-room, drawing-room, music-room, magistrate's room, gentleman's-room, and billiard-room, with one or two others to which no name had been applied. Many of these rooms had doors which led into the one adjacent; but this was not invariably the case, for from the main corridor branched off several little passages, separating in some instances one chamber from the other, and leading out upon the terrace by the smaller doors which we have noticed above. What was the use of these passages and doors nobody was ever able to divine, and it remains a mystery to the present day, which I shall not attempt to solve by venturing any hypothesis upon so recondite a subject. The second floor above was laid out much in the same way as the one below, except that one of the limbs of the cross was wanting, the space over the great door being appropriated to a very tolerable bed-room. From this floor to the other, descended two or three staircases, the principal one being the great open flight of steps which I have already mentioned; and the second, or next in importance, being a stone staircase, which reached the ground between the double doors, that shut out the main hall from the offices.

Having thus given some idea of the interior of the building, I will only pause to notice, that, at the period I speak of, it had one very great defect. It was very much out of repair, — not, indeed, of that sort of substantial repair which is necessary to comfort, but of that pleasant repair which is agreeable to the eye. It was well and solidly built, and was quite wind and water tight; but

although the builders of the day in which it was erected were, as every one knows, peculiarly neat in their brick-work, yet Time would have his way even with their constructions, and he had maliciously chiselled out the pointing from between the sharp, well-cut bricks, scraped away the mortar from the stone copings, and cracked and blistered the painting of the wood-work. This labour of his had not only given a venerable, but also a somewhat dilapidated appearance to the mansion; and some green mould, with which he had taken the pains to dabble all the white parts of the edifice, did not decrease the look of decay.

Sweeping round from the parish road that we have mentioned was a branch, leading by the side of the lawn, and a gentle ascent up to the terrace and to the great door, and carriages on arriving passed along the whole front of the house by the western angle before they reached the court-yard behind. But from that court-yard there were various other means of exit. One to the kitchen garden, one to two or three other courts, and one into the wood which came within fifty yards of the enclosure; for, to use the ordinary romance phrase, Harbourne House was literally "bosomed in wood." The windows, however, and the front, commanded a fine view of a rich and undulating country, plentifully garnished with trees, but still, for a considerable distance, exposed to the eye, from the elevated ground upon which the mansion was placed. A little hamlet was seen at the distance of about two miles in front — I rather suspect it was Kenchill — and to the eastward the house looked over the valley towards the high ground by Woodchurch and Woodchurch Beacon, catching a blue line which probably was Romney Marsh. Between Woodchurch, however, and itself, was seen standing out, straight and upright, a very trim-looking white dwelling, flanked by some pleasant groves, and to the west were seen one or two gentlemen's seats scattered about over the face of the country. Behind, nothing of course was to be seen but tree-tops, except from the window of one of the attics, whence the housemaid could descry Biddenden Windmill and the top of Biddenden Church. Harbourne Wood was indeed, at that time, very extensive, joining on to the large piece of woodland, from which it is now separated, and stretching out as far as that place

with an unpleasant name, called Gallows Green. The whole of this space, and a considerable portion of the cultivated ground around, was within the manor of the master of the mansion, Sir Robert Croyland, of Harbourne, the elder brother of that Mr. Zachary Croyland, whom we have seen travelling down into Kent with two companions in the newly established stage-coach.

About four days after that memorable journey, a traveller on horseback, followed by a servant leading another horse, and with a portmanteau behind him, rode up the little parish road we have mentioned, took the turning which led to the terrace, and drew in his bridle at the great door of Harbourne House. I would describe him again, but I have already given the reader so correct and accurate a picture of Sir Edward Digby, that he cannot make any mistake. The only change which had taken place in his appearance since he set out from London, was produced by his being now dressed in a full military costume; but nevertheless the eyes of a fair lady, who was in the drawing-room and had a full view of the terrace, conveyed to her mind, as she saw him ride up, the impression that he was a very handsome man indeed. In two minutes more, which were occupied by the opening of the door and sundry directions given by the young baronet to his servant, Sir Edward Digby was ushered into the drawing-room, and advanced with a frank, free, military air, though unacquainted with any of the persons it contained. As his arrival about that hour was expected, the whole family of Harbourne House was assembled to receive him; and before we proceed farther, we may as well give some account of the different persons of whom the little circle was composed.

The first whom Sir Edward's eyes fell upon was the master of the mansion, who had risen, and was coming forward to welcome his guest. Sir Robert Croyland, however, was so different a person from his brother, in every point, that the young officer could hardly believe that he had the baronet before him. He was a large, heavy-looking man, with good features and expressive eyes, but sallow in complexion, and though somewhat corpulent, having that look of loose, flabby obesity, which is generally an indication of bad health. His dress, though scrupulously clean

and in the best fashion of the time, fitted him ill, being too large even for his large person; and the setting of the diamond ring which he wore upon his hand was scarcely more yellow than the hand itself. On his face he bore a look of habitual thought and care, approaching moroseness, which even the smile he assumed on Sir Edward's appearance could not altogether dissipate. In his tone, however, he was courtly and kind, though perhaps a little pompous, expressed his delight at seeing his old friend's son in Harbourne House, shook him warmly by the hand, and then led him ceremoniously forward to introduce him to his sister, Mrs. Barbara Croyland, and his two daughters.

The former lady might very well have had applied to her Fielding's inimitable description of the old maid. Her appearance was very similar, her station and occupation much the same; but nevertheless, in all essential points, Mrs. Barbara Croyland was a very different person from the sister of Squire Allworthy. She was a kind-hearted soul as ever existed; gentle in her nature, anxious to do the very best for every body, a little given to policy for the purpose of accomplishing that end, and consequently, nine times out of ten, making folks very uncomfortable in order to make them comfortable, and doing all manner of mischief for the purpose of setting things right. No woman ever had a more perfect abnegation of self than Mrs. Barbara Croyland, in all things of great importance. She had twice missed a very good opportunity of marriage, by making up a match between one who was quite ready to be her own lover and one of her female friends, for whom he cared very little. She had lent the whole of her own private fortune, except a small annuity, which by some chance had been settled upon her, to her brother Sir Robert, without taking any security whatsoever for principal or interest; and she was always ready, when there was anything in her purse, to give it away to the worthy or unworthy — rather, indeed, preferring the latter, from a conviction that they were more likely to be destitute of friends than those who had some claim upon society.

Nevertheless Mrs. Barbara Croyland was not altogether without that small sort of selfishness which is usually termed vanity. She was occasionally a little affronted and indignant with her

friends, when they disapproved of her spoiling their whole plans with the intention of facilitating them. She knew that her design was good; and she thought it very ungrateful in the world to be angry when her good designs produced the most opposite results to those which she intended. She was fully convinced, too, that circumstances were perversely against her; and yet for her life she could not refrain from trying to make those circumstances bend to her purpose, notwithstanding all the raps on the knuckles she received; and she had still some scheme going on, which, though continually disappointed, rose up Hydra-like, with a new head springing out as soon as the other was cut off. As it was at her suggestion, and in favour of certain plans which she kept deep in the recesses of her own bosom, that Sir Robert Croyland had claimed acquaintance with Sir Edward Digby on the strength of an old friendship with his father, and had invited him down to Harbourne House immediately on the return of his regiment to England, it may well be supposed that Miss Barbara received him with her most gracious smiles — which, to say the truth, though the face was wrinkled with age, and the complexion not very good, were exceedingly sweet and benignant, springing from a natural kindness of heart, which, if guided by a sounder discretion, would have rendered her one of the most amiable persons on the earth.

After a few words of simple courtesy on both parts, Sir Edward turned to the other two persons who were in the room, where he found metal more attractive — at least, for the eyes. The first to whom he was introduced was a young lady, who seemed to be about one-and-twenty years of age, though she had in fact just attained another year; and though Sir Robert somewhat hurried him on to the next, who was younger, the keen eye of the young officer marked enough to make him aware that, if so cold and so little disposed to look on a lover as her uncle had represented, she might well become a very dangerous neighbour to a man with a heart not well guarded against the power of beauty. Her hair, eyes, and eyelashes were almost black, and her complexion of a clear brown, with the rose blushing faintly in the cheek; but the eyes were of a deep blue. The whole form of the

head, the fall of the hair, the bend of the neck from the shoulders, were all exquisitely symmetrical and classical, and nothing could be more lovely than the line of the brow and the chiselled cutting of the nose. The upper lip, small and delicately drawn, the under lip full and slightly apart, showing the pearl-like teeth beneath; the turn of the ear, and the graceful line in the throat, might all have served as models for the sculptor or the painter; for the colouring was as rich and beautiful as the form; and when she rose and stood to receive him, with the small hand leaning gently on the arm of the chair, he thought he had never seen anything more graceful than the figure, or more harmonious than its calm dignity, with the lofty gravity of her countenance. If there was a defect in the face, it was perhaps that the chin was a little too prominent, but yet it suited well with the whole countenance and with its expression, giving it decision without harshness, and a look of firmness, which the bright smile that fluttered for a moment round the lips, deprived of everything that was not gentle and kind. There was soul, there was thought, there was feeling, in the whole look; and Digby would fain have paused to see those features animated in conversation. But her father led him on, after a single word of introduction, to present him to his younger daughter, who, with some points of resemblance, offered a strange contrast to her sister. She, too, was very handsome, and apparently about two years younger; but hers was the style of beauty which, though it deserves a better name, is generally termed pretty. All the features were good, and the hair exceedingly beautiful; but the face was not so oval, the nose perhaps a little too short, and the lips too sparkling with smiles to impress the mind, at first sight, so much as the countenance of the other. She seemed all happiness; and in looking to the expression and at her bright blue eyes, as they looked out through the black lashes, like violets from a clump of dark leaves, it was scarcely possible to fancy that she had ever known a touch of care or sorrow, or that one of the anxieties of life had ever even brushed her lightly with its wing. She seemed the flower just opening to the morning sunshine — the fruit, before the bloom had been washed away by one shower. Her figure, too, was full of young

grace; her movements were all quicker, more wild and free than her sister's; and as she rose to receive Sir Edward Digby, it was more with the air of an old friend than a new acquaintance. Indeed, she was the first of the family who had seen him, for hers were the eyes which had watched his approach from the window, so that she felt as if she knew him better than any of them.

There was something very winning in the frank and cordial greeting with which she met him, and in an instant it had established a sort of communication between them which would have taken hours, perhaps days, to bring about with her sister. As Sir Edward Digby did not come there to fall in love, he would fain have resisted such influences, even at the beginning; and perhaps the words of old Mr. Croyland had somewhat put him upon his guard. But it was of no use being upon his guard; for, fortify himself as strongly as he would, Zara went through all his defences in an instant; and, seeming to take it for granted that they were to be great friends, and that there was not the slightest obstacle whatever to their being perfectly familiar in a lady-like and gentleman-like manner, of course they were so in five minutes, though he was a soldier who had seen some service, and she an inexperienced girl just out of her teens. But all women have a sort of experience of their own; or, if experience be not the right name, an intuition in matters where the other sex is concerned, which supplies to them very rapidly a great part of that which long converse with the world bestows on men. Too true that it does not always act as a safeguard to their own hearts—true that it does not always guide them right in their own actions,—but still it does not fail to teach them the best means of winning where they wish to win; and if they do not succeed, it is far more frequently that the cards which they hold are not good, than that they play the game unskillfully.

Whether Sir Robert Croyland had or had not any forethought in his invitation of Sir Edward Digby, and, like a prudent father, judged that it would be quite as well his youngest daughter should marry a wealthy baronet, he was too wise to let anything like design appear; and though he suffered the young officer to pursue his conversation with Zara for two or three minutes longer than he

had done with her sister, he soon interposed, by taking the first opportunity of telling his guest the names of those whom he had invited to meet him that day at dinner.

"We shall have but a small party," he said, in a somewhat apologetic tone, "for several of our friends are absent just now; but I have asked my good and eccentric brother Zachary to meet you to-day, Sir Edward; and also my excellent neighbour, Mr. Radford, of Radford Hall — a very superior man indeed under the surface, though the manner may be a little rough. His son, too, I trust will join us;" and he glanced his eye towards Edith, whose face grew somewhat paler than it had been before. Sir Robert instantly withdrew his gaze; but the look of both father and daughter had not been lost upon Digby; and he replied —

"I have the pleasure of knowing your brother already, Sir Robert. We were fellow-travellers as far as Ashford, four or five days ago. I hope he is well."

"Oh, quite well — quite well," answered the baronet; "but as odd as ever — nay odder, I think, for his expedition to London. That which seems to polish and soften other men, but renders him rougher and more extraordinary. But he was always very odd — very odd indeed, even as a boy."

"Ay, but he was always kind-hearted, brother Robert," observed Miss Barbara; "and though he may be a little odd, he has been in odd places, you know — India and the like; and besides, it does not do to talk of his oddity, as you are doing always, for if he heard of it, he might leave all his money away."

"He is only odd, I think," said Edith Croyland, "by being kinder and better than other men."

Sir Edward Digby turned towards her with a warm smile, replying — "So it struck me, Miss Croyland. He is so good and right-minded himself, that he is at times a little out of patience with the faults and follies of others — at least, such was my impression, from all I saw of him."

"It was a just one," answered the young lady, "and I am sure, Sir Edward, the more you see of him the more you will be inclined to overlook the oddities for the sake of the finer qualities."

It seemed to Sir Edward Digby that the commendations of Sir

Robert Croyland's brother did not seem the most grateful of all possible sounds to the ears of the Baronet, who immediately after announced that he would have the pleasure of conducting his young guest to his apartments, adding that they were early people in the country, their usual dinner-hour being four o'clock, though he found that the fashionable people of London were now in the habit of dining at half-past four. Sir Edward accordingly followed him up the great oaken staircase to a very handsome and comfortable room, with a dressing-room at the side, in which he found his servant already busily employed in disburdening his bags and portmanteau of their contents.

Sir Robert paused for a moment — to see that his guest had everything which he might require, and then left him. But the young baronet did not proceed immediately to the business of the toilet, seating himself before the window of the bed-room, and gazing out with a thoughtful expression, while his servant continued his operations in the next room. From time to time the man looked in as if he had something to say, but his master continued in a reverie, of which it may be as well to take some notice. His first thought was, "I must lay out the plan of my campaign; but I must take care not to get my wing of the army defeated while the main body is moving up to give battle. On my life, I'm a great deal too good-natured to put myself in such a dangerous position for a friend. The artillery that the old gentleman spoke of is much more formidable than I expected. My worthy colonel did not use so much of love's glowing colours in his painting as I supposed; but after all, there's no danger; I am proof against all such shots, and I fancy I must use little Zara for the purpose of getting at her sister's secrets. There can be no harm in making a little love to her, the least little bit possible. It will do my pretty coquette no harm, and me none either. It may be well to know how the land lies, however; and I dare say that fellow of mine has made some discoveries already; but the surest way to get nothing out of him is to ask him, and so I must let him take his own way."

His thoughts then turned to another branch of the same subject; and he went on pondering rather than thinking for some

minutes more. There is a state of mind which can scarcely be called thought; for thought is rapid and progressive, like the flight of a bird, whether it be in the gyrations of the swallow, or the straight-forward course of the rook; but in the mode or condition of which I speak, the mind seems rather to hover over a particular object, like the hawk eyeing carefully that which is beneath it; and this state can no more be called thought than the hovering of the hawk can be called flight. Such was the occupation of Sir Edward Digby, as I have said, for several minutes, and then he went on to his conclusions. "She loves him still," he said to himself; "of that I feel sure. She is true to him still, and steadfast in her truth. Whatever may have been said or done has not been hers, and that is a great point gained; for now, with station, rank, distinction, and competence at least, he presents himself in a very different position from any which he could assume before; and unless on account of some unaccountable prejudice, the old gentleman can have no objection. Oh, yes, she loves him still, I feel very sure! The calm gravity of that beautiful face has only been written there so early by some deep and unchanged feeling. We never see the sparkling brightness of youth so shadowed but by some powerful and ever-present memory, which, like the deep bass notes of a fine instrument, gives a solemn tone even to the liveliest music of life. She can smile, but the brow is still grave: there is something underneath it; and we must find out exactly what that is. Yet I cannot doubt; I am sure of it. Here, Somers! are not those things ready yet? I shall be too late for dinner."

"Oh, no, Sir;" replied the man, coming in, and putting up the back of his hand to his head, in military fashion. "Your Honour won't be too late. The great bell rings always half-an-hour before, then Mr. Radford is always a quarter-of-an-hour behind his time."

"I wonder who Mr. Radford is!" said Sir Edward Digby, as if speaking to himself. "He seems a very important person in the county."

"I can tell you, Sir," said the man, "he is or was the richest person in the neighbourhood, and has got Sir Robert quite under

his thumb, they say. He was a merchant, or a shopkeeper, the butler told me, in Hythe. But there was more money came in than ever went through his counting-house, and what between trading one way or another, he got together a great deal of riches, bought this place here in the neighbourhood, and set up for a gentleman. His son is to be married to Miss Croyland, they say; but the servants think that she hates him, and fancy that he would himself rather have her sister."

The latter part of this speech was that which interested Sir Edward Digby the most; but he knew that there was a certain sort of perversity about his servant, which made him less willing to answer a distinct question than to volunteer any information; and therefore he fixed upon another point, inquiring, "What do you mean, Somers, by saying that he is, or was, the richest man in the country?"

"Why, Sir, that is as it may be," answered the man; "but one thing is certain — Miss Croyland has three times refused to marry this young Radford, notwithstanding all her father could say; and as for the young gentleman himself, why he's no gentleman at all, going about with all the bad characters in the county, and carrying on his father's old trade, like a highwayman. It has not quite answered so well though, for they say old Radford lost fully fifty thousand pounds by his last venture, which was run ashore somewhere about Romney Hoy. The boats were sunk, part of the goods seized, and the rest sent to the bottom. You may be sure he's a dare-devil, however, for whenever the servants speak of him, they sink their voice to a whisper, as if the fiend were at their elbow."

Sir Edward Digby was very well inclined to hear more; but while the man was speaking, the bell he had mentioned, rang, and the young baronet, who had a certain regard for his own personal appearance, hastened to dress and to descend to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI.

It is sometimes expedient in telling a tale of this kind, to introduce the different personages quietly to the reader one after the other, and to suffer him to become familiar with them separately, before they are all brought to act together, that he may have a clear and definite notion of their various characters, dispositions, and peculiarities, and be enabled to judge at once of the motives by which they are actuated, when we recite the deeds that they perform.

Having twice or thrice mentioned one of the prominent persons in this history, without having brought him visibly upon the scene, (as, in the natural course of events, I must very soon do,) I shall now follow the plan above mentioned; and, in order to give the reader a distinct notion of Mr. Radford, his character and proceedings, will beg those who have gone on with me thus far, to step back with me to the same night, on which Mr. Warde and his young friend met the smuggler in his evening walk along the heights.

Not very far from the town of Hythe, not very far from the village of Sandgate, are still to be found the ruins of an ancient castle, which, by various deeds that have been performed within its walls, has acquired a name in English history. The foundation of the building is beyond our records; and tradition, always fond of the marvellous, carries back the period when the first stone was laid to the times of the Roman invaders of Great Britain. Others supposed that it was erected by the Saxons, but, as it now stands, it presents no trace of the handiwork of either of those two races of barbarians, and is simply one of those strongholds constructed by the Normans, or their close descendants, either to keep their hold of a conquered country, or to resist the power both of tyrannical monarchs and dangerous neighbours. Various parts of the building are undoubtedly attributable to the reign of Henry II.; and if any portion be of an earlier date, of which I have some doubts, it is but small; but a considerable part is, I believe, of a still later epoch, and in some places may be traced

the architecture common in the reign of Edward III. and of his grandson. The space enclosed within the outer walls is very extensive, and numerous detached buildings, chapels, halls, and apparently a priory, are still to be found built against those walls themselves, so that it is probable that the castle in remote days gave shelter to some religious body, which is rendered still more likely from the fact of Saltwood Castle and its manor having formerly appertained to the church and see of Canterbury.

Many a remarkable scene has undoubtedly passed in the courts and halls of that now ruined building, and it is even probable that there the dark and dreadful deed, which, though probably not of his contriving, embittered the latter life of the second Henry, was planned and determined by the murderers of Thomas-à-Becket. With such deeds, however, and those ancient times, we have nothing here to do; and at the period to which this tale refers, the castle, though in a much more perfect state than at present, was already in ruins. The park, which formerly surrounded it, had been long thrown open and divided into fields; but still the character which its formation had given to the neighbouring scenery had not passed away; and the rich extent of old pasture, the scattered woods and clumps of trees, the brawling brook, here and there diverted from its natural course for ornament or convenience, — all bespoke the former destination of the ground, for near a mile around on every side, when magnificent Archbishop Courtenay held the castle of Saltwood as his favourite place of residence.

Though, as I have said, grey ruin had possession of the building, yet the strength of its construction had enabled it in many parts to resist the attacks of time; and the great keep, with its two lofty gate towers and wide-spreading hall, was then but very little decayed. Nevertheless, at that period no one tenanted the castle of Saltwood but an old man and his son, who cultivated a small portion of ground in the neighbourhood; and their dwelling was confined to three rooms in the keep, though they occupied several others by their implements of husbandry, occasionally diversified with sacks of grain, stores of carrots and turnips, and other articles of agricultural produce. Thus, every night, for a

short time, lights were to be seen in Saltwood Castle, but all the buildings except the keep, were utterly neglected, and falling rapidly into a state of complete dilapidation.

It was towards this building, on the night I speak of, that the smuggler took his way, about a quarter of an hour after having suddenly broken off his conversation with Mr. Warde and the young officer. He walked on with a quick, bold, careless step, apparently without much thought or consideration of the interview to which he was summoned. He paused, indeed, more than once, and looked around him; but it was merely to gaze at the beauty of the scenery, for which he had a great natural taste. It is no slight mistake to suppose that the constant intercourse with, and opportunity of enjoying the beauties of nature, diminish in any degree the pleasures that we thence derive. The direct contrary is the case. Every other delight, everything that man has contrived or found for himself, palls upon the taste by frequent fruition; but not so with those sources of pleasure which are given us by God himself; and the purer and freer they are from man's invention, the more permanent are they in their capability of bestowing happiness, the more extensive seems their quality of satisfying the ever-increasing desires of the spirit within us. Were it not so, the ardent attachment which is felt by those who have been born and brought up in the midst of fine and magnificent scenery to the place of their nativity, could not exist; and it will always be found that, other things being equal, those who live most amongst the beauties of nature, are those who most appreciate them.

Many a beautiful prospect presented itself to the smuggler, as he walked on by the light of the moon. At one place, the woods swept round him and concealed the rest of the country from his eyes; but then the moonbeams poured through the branches, or streamed along the path, and every now and then, between the old trunks and gnarled roots, he caught a sight of the deeper parts of the woodland, sleeping in the pale rays. At another, issuing forth upon the side of the hill, the leafy wilderness lay beneath his feet with the broad round summit of some piece of high ground, rising dark and flat above; and at some distance further, he sud-

denly turned the angle of the valley, and had the tall grey ruin of Saltwood full before him, with the lines of the trees and meadows sweeping down into the dell, and the bright sky, lustrous with the moonlight, extended broad and unclouded behind. Shortly after, he came to the little stream, rushing in miniature cascades between its hollow banks, and murmuring with a soft and musical voice amongst the roots of the shrubs, which here and there hid it from the beams.

He paused but a moment or two, however, at any of these things, and then walked on again, till at length he climbed the road leading up to the castle, and passed through the arch-way of the gate. Of the history of the place he knew nothing, but from vague traditions heard in his boyhood; and yet, when he stood amongst those old grey walls, with the high towers rising before him, and the green-sward, covering the decacy of centuries, beneath his feet, he could not help feeling a vague impression of melancholy, not unmingled with awe, fall upon him. In the presence of ancient things, the link between all mortality seems most strongly felt. We perceive our association with the dead more strongly. The character and habits of thought of the person, of course, render it a more distinct or obscure perception; but still we all have it. With some, it is as I have before called it, an impression that we must share the same decay, meet the same fate, fall into the same tomb as those who have raised or produced the things that we behold; for every work of man is but a tombstone, if it be read aright. But with others, an audible voice speaks from the grey ruin and the ancient church, from the dilapidated houses where our fathers dwelt or worshipped, and says to every one amongst the living, "As they were, who built us, so must you be. They enjoyed, and hoped, and feared, and suffered. So do you. Where are they gone, with all their thoughts? Where will you go, think you never so highly? All down, down, to the same dust, whither we too are tending. We have seen these things, for ages past, and we shall see more."

I mean not to say that such was exactly the aspect under which those ruins presented themselves to the eye of the man who now visited them. The voice that spoke was not so clear; but yet it

was clear enough to make him feel thoughtful if not sad; and he paused to gaze up at the high keep, as the moon shone out upon the old stone-work, showing every loophole and casement. He was not without imagination in a homely way, and, following the train of thought which the sight of the castle at that hour suggested, he said to himself, "I dare say many a pretty girl has looked out of that window to talk to her lover by the moonlight; and they have grown old, and died like other folks."

How long he would have gone on in this musing mood I cannot tell, but just at that moment the boy who had come down to the beach to call him, appeared from the old doorway of the chapel, and pointing to one of the towers in the wall, whispered — "He's up there, waiting for you."

"Well, then, you run home, young Starlight," replied the smuggler. "I'll be after you in a minute, for he can't have much to say, I should think. Off with you! and no listening, or I'll break your head, youngster."

The boy laughed, and ran away through the gate; and his companion turned towards the angle which he had pointed out. Approaching the wall, he entered what might have been a door, or perhaps a window looking in upon the court, and communicating with one of those passages which led from tower to tower, with stairs every here and there leading to the battlements. He was obliged to bow his head as he passed; but after climbing a somewhat steep ascent, where the broken steps were half covered with rubbish, he emerged upon the top of the wall, where many a sentinel had kept his weary watch in times long past. At a little distance in advance, standing in the pale moonlight, was a tall, gaunt figure, leaning against a fragment of one of the neighbouring towers; and Harding did not pause to look at the splendour of the view below, though it might well, with its world of wood and meadow, bounded by the glistening sea, have attracted eyes less fond of such scenes than his; but on he walked, straight towards the person before him, who, on his part, hurried forward to meet him, whenever the sound of his step broke upon the ear.

"Good night, Harding," said Mr. Radford, in a low but still

harsh tone; "what a time you have been. It will be one o'clock or more before I get back."

"Past two," answered the smuggler, bluntly; "but I came as soon as I could. It is not much more than half an hour since I got your message."

"That stupid boy has been playing the fool, then," replied the other; "I sent him —"

"Oh, he's not stupid," interrupted the smuggler; "and he's not given to play the fool either. More like to play the rogue. But what's the business now, Sir? There's no doing anything on such nights as these."

"I know that — I know that," rejoined Radford. "But this will soon change. The moon will be dwindled down to cheese-paring before many days are over, and the barometer is falling. It is necessary that we should make all our arrangements beforehand, Harding, and have everything ready. We must have no more such jobs as the last two."

"I had nothing to do with them," rejoined the smuggler. "You chose your own people, and they failed. I do not mean to say it was their fault, for I don't think it was. They lost as much, for them, as you did; and they did their best, I dare say; but still that is nothing to me. I've undertaken to land the cargo, and I will do it, if I live. If I die, there's nothing to be said, you know; but I don't say I'll ever undertake another of the sort. It does not answer, Mr. Radford. It makes a man think too much, to know that other people have got so much money staked on such a venture."

"Ay, but that is the very cause why every one should exert himself," answered his companion. "I lost fifty thousand pounds by the last affair, twenty by the other; but I tell you, Harding, I have more than both upon this, and if this fail —"

He paused, and did not finish the sentence; but he set his teeth hard, and seemed to draw his breath with difficulty.

"That's a bad plan," said the smuggler — "a bad plan, in all ways. You wish to make up all at one run; and so you double the venture; but you should know by this time, that one out of four pays very well, and we have seldom failed to do one out of two or

three; but the more money people get the more greedy they are of it; so that because you put three times as much as enough on one freight, you must needs put five times on the other, and ten times on the third, risking a greater loss every time for a greater gain. I'll have to do with no more of these things. I'm contented with little, and don't like such great speculations."

"Oh, if you are afraid," cried Mr. Radford, "you can give it up! I dare say we can find some one else to land the goods."

"As to being afraid, that I am not," answered Harding; "and having undertaken the run, I'll do it. I'm not half so much afraid as you are; for I've not near so much to lose — only my life or liberty and three hundred pounds. But still, Mr. Radford, I do not like to think that if anything goes wrong you'll be so much hurt; and it makes a man feel queer. If I have a few hundreds in a boat, and nothing to lose but myself and a dozen of tubs, I go about it as gay as a lark and as cool and quiet as a dog-fish; but if anything were to go wrong now, why it would be —"

"Ruin — utter ruin!" said Mr. Radford.

"I dare say it would," rejoined the smuggler; "but, nevertheless, your coming down here every other day, and sending for me, does no good, and a great deal of harm. It only teases me, and sets me always thinking about it, when the best way is not to think at all, but just to do the thing and get it over. Besides, you'll have people noticing your being so often down here, and you'll make them suspect something is going on."

"But it is necessary, my good fellow," answered the other, "that we should settle all our plans. I must have people ready, and horses and help, in case of need."

"Ay, that you must," replied the smuggler, thoughtfully. "I think you said the cargo was light goods."

"Almost all India," said Radford, in return. "Shawls and painted silks, and other things of great value but small bulk. There are a few bales of lace, too; but the whole will require well nigh a hundred horses to carry it, so that we must have a strong muster."

"Ay, and men who fight, too," rejoined Harding. "You know there are Dragoons down at Folkestone?"

"No! — when did they come?" exclaimed Radford, eagerly. "That's a bad job — that's a bad job! Perhaps they suspect already. Perhaps some of those fellows from the other side have given information, and these soldiers are sent down in consequence — I shouldn't wonder, I shouldn't wonder."

"Pooh — nonsense, Mr. Radford!" replied Harding; "you are always so suspicious. Some day or another you'll suspect me."

"I suspect everybody," cried Radford, vehemently, "and I have good cause. I have known men do such things, for a pitiful gain, as would hang them, if there were any just punishment for treachery."

Harding laughed, but he did not explain the cause of his merriment, though probably he thought that Mr. Radford himself would do many a thing for a small gain, which would not lightly touch his soul's salvation. He soon proceeded, however, to reply, in a grave tone — "That's a bad plan, Mr. Radford. No man is ever well served by those whom he suspects. He had better never have anything to do with a person he doubts; so, if you doubt me, I'm quite willing to give the business up, for I don't half like it."

"Oh, no!" said Radford, in a smooth and coaxing tone, "I did not mean you, Harding; I know you too well for as honest a fellow as ever lived; but I do doubt those fellows on the other side, and I strongly suspect they peached about the other two affairs. Besides, you said something about Dragoons, and we have not had any of that sort of vermin here for a year or more."

"You frighten yourself about nothing," answered Harding. "There is but a troop of them yet, though they say more are expected. But what good are Dragoons? I have run many a cargo under their very noses, and hope I shall live to run many another. As to stopping this traffic, they are no more good than so many old women!"

"But you must get it all over before the rest come," replied Mr. Radford, in an argumentative manner, taking hold of the lappel of his companion's jacket; "there's no use of running more risk than needful. And you must remember that we have a long

way to carry the goods after they are landed. Then is the most dangerous time."

"I don't know that," said Harding; "but, however, you must provide for that, and must also look out for *hides** for the things. I won't have any of them down with me; and when I have landed them safely, though I don't mind giving a help to bring them a little way inland, I won't be answerable for anything more."

"No, no; that's all settled," answered his companion; "and the hides are all ready, too. Some can come into my stable, others can be carried up to the willow cave. Then there's Sir Robert's great barn."

"Will Sir Robert consent?" asked Harding, in a doubtful tone. "He would never have anything to do with these matters himself, and was always devilish hard upon us. I remember he sent my father to gaol ten years ago, when I was a youngster."

"He must consent," replied Radford, sternly. "He dare as soon refuse me as cut off his right hand. I tell you, Harding, I have got him in a vice; and one turn of the lever will make him cry for mercy when I like. But no more of him. I shall use his barn as if it were my own; and it is in the middle of the wood, you know, so that it's out of sight. But even if it were not for that, we've got many another place. Thank Heaven, there are no want of hides in this county!"

"Ay, but the worst of dry goods, and things of that kind," rejoined the smuggler, "is that they spoil with a little wet, so that one can't sink them in a cut or canal till they are wanted, as one can do with tubs. Who do you intend to send down for them? That's one thing I must know."

"Oh, whoever comes, my son will be with them," answered Mr. Radford. "As to who the others will be, I cannot tell yet. The Ramleys, certainly, amongst the rest. They are always ready, and will either fight or run, as it may be needed."

* It may be as well to explain to the uninitiated reader, that the secret places where smugglers conceal their goods after landing, are known by the name of "Hides."

"I don't much like them," replied Harding; "they are a bad set. I wish they were hanged, or out of the country; for, as you say, they will either fight, or run, or peach, or anything else that suits them: one just as soon as another."

"Oh, no fear of that — no fear of that!" exclaimed Mr. Radford, in a confident tone, which seemed somewhat strange to the ears of his companion, after the suspicions he had heard him so lately express; but the other instantly added, in explanation, "I shall take care that they have no means of peaching, for I will tell them nothing about it, till they are setting off with fifty or sixty others."

"That's the best way, and the only way with such fellows as that," answered Harding; "but if you tell nobody, you'll find it a hard job to get them all together."

"Only let the day be fixed," said Mr. Radford; "and I'll have all ready — never fear."

"That must be your affair," replied Harding; "I'm ready whenever you like. Give me a dark night and a fair wind, and my part of the job is soon done."

"About this day week, I should think," said Mr. Radford. "The moon will be nearly out by that time."

"Not much more than half," replied the smuggler; "and as we have got to go far, — for the ship, you say, will not stand in, — we had better have the whole night to ourselves. Even a bit of a moon is a bad companion on such a trip; especially when there is so much money risked. No, I think you had better give me three days more: then there will be wellnigh nothing left of her, and she won't rise till three or four. We can see what the weather's like, too, about that time; and I can come up, and let you know. But if you'll take my advice, Mr. Radford, you'll not be coming down here any more, till it's all over at least. There's no good of it, and it may do mischief."

"Well, now it's all settled, I shall not need to do so," rejoined the other; "but I really don't see, Harding, why you should so much wish me to stay away."

"I'll tell you why, Mr. Radford," said Harding, putting his hands into the pockets of his jacket, "and that very easily."

Although you have become a great gentleman, and live at a fine place inland, people haven't forgot when you kept a house and a counting-house too, in Hythe, and all that used to go on in those days; and though you are a magistrate, and go out hunting and shooting, and all that, the good folks about have little doubt that you have a hankering after the old trade yet, only that you do your business on a larger scale than you did then. It's but the other day, when I was in at South's, the grocer's, to talk to him about some stuff he wanted, I heard two men say one to the other, as they saw you pass, 'Ay, there goes old Radford. I wonder what he's down here for!' 'As great an old smuggler as ever lived,' said the other; 'and a pretty penny he's made of it. He's still at it, they say; and I dare say he's down here now upon some such concern.' So you see, Sir, people talk about it, and that's the reason why I say that the less you are here the better."

"Perhaps it is — perhaps it is," answered Mr. Radford, quickly; "and as we've now settled all we can settle, till you come up, I'll take myself home. Good night, Harding — good night!"

"Good night, Sir," answered Harding, with something like a smile upon his lip; and finding their way down again to the court below, they parted.

"I don't like that fellow at all," said Mr. Radford to himself, as he walked away upon the road to Hythe, where he had left his horse; "he's more than half inclined to be uncivil. I'll have nothing more to do with him after this is over."

Harding took his way across the fields towards Sandgate, and perhaps his thoughts were not much more complimentary to his companion than Mr. Radford's had been to him; but in the meantime, while each followed his separate course homeward, we must remain for a short space in the green, moonlight court of Saltwood Castle. All remained still and silent for about three minutes; but then the ivy, which at that time had gathered thickly round the old walls, might be seen to move in the neighbourhood of a small aperture in one of the ruined flanking towers of the outer wall, to which it had at one time probably served as a window, though all traces of its original form were now lost. The tower was close to the spot where Mr. Radford and his companion

had been standing; and although the aperture we have mentioned looked towards the court, joining on to a projecting wall in great part overthrown, there was a loop-hole on the other side, flanking the very parapet on which they had carried on their conversation.

After the ivy had moved for a moment, as I have said, something like a human head was thrust out, looking cautiously round the court. The next minute a broad pair of shoulders appeared, and then the whole form of a tall and powerful man, who, after pausing for an instant on the top of the broken wall, used its fragments as a means of descent to the ground below. Just as he reached the level of the court, one of the loose stones which he had displaced as he came down, rolled after him and fell at his side; and, with a sudden start at the first sound, he laid his hand on the butt of a large horse-pistol stuck in a belt round his waist. As soon as he perceived what it was that had alarmed him, he took his hand from the weapon again, and walked out into the moonlight; and thence, after pacing quietly up and down for two or three minutes, to give time for the two other visitors of the castle to get to a distance, he sauntered slowly out through the gate. He then turned under the walls towards the little wood which at that time occupied a part of the valley; opposite to which he stood gazing for about five minutes. When he judged all safe, he gave a whistle, upon which the form of a boy instantly started out from the trees, and came running across the meadow towards him.

"Have you heard all, Mr. Mowle?" asked the boy in a whisper, as soon as he was near.

"All that they said, Little Starlight," replied the other. "They didn't say enough; but yet it will do; and you are a clever little fellow. But come along," he added, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "you shall have what I promised you, and half-a-crown more; and if you go on, and tell me all you find out, you shall be well paid."

Thus saying, he walked on with the boy towards Hythe, and the scenery round Saltwood resumed its silent solitude again.

CHAPTER VII.

To a very hungry man, it matters not much what is put upon the table, so that it be eatable; but with the intellectual appetite the case is different, and every one is anxious to know who is to be his companion, or what is to be in his book. Now, Sir Edward Digby was somewhat of an epicure in human character; and he always felt as great a curiosity to enjoy any new personage brought before him, as the more ordinary epicure desires to taste a new dish. He was equally refined, too, in regard to the taste of his intellectual food. He liked a good deal of flavour, but not too much: a soupçon of something, he did not well know what, in a man's demeanour gave it great zest, as a soupçon of two or three condiments so blended in a salmi as to defy analysis must have charmed Vatel; and, to say the truth, the little he had seen or heard of the house in which he now was, together with his knowledge of some of its antecedents, had awakened a great desire for a farther taste of its quality.

When he went down stairs, then, and opened the dining-room door, his eye naturally ran round in search of the new guests. Only two, however, had arrived, in the first of whom he recognised Mr. Zachary Croyland. The other was a venerable looking old man, in black, whom he could not conceive to be Mr. Radford, from the previous account which he had heard of that respectable gentleman's character. It turned out, however, that the person before him — who had been omitted by Sir Robert Croyland in the enumeration of his expected visitors — was the clergyman of the neighbouring village; and being merely a plain, good man, of very excellent sense, but neither, rich noble, nor thrifty, was nobody in the opinion of the baronet.

As soon as Sir Edward Digby appeared, Mr. Zachary Croyland, with his back tall, straight, and stiff as a poker, advanced towards him, and shook him cordially by the hand. "Welcome, welcome, my young friend," he said; "you've kept your word, I see; and that's a good sign of any man, especially when he knows that there's neither pleasure, profit, nor popularity to be gained by so

doing; and I'm sure there's none of either to be had in this remote corner of the world. You have some object, of course, in coming among us; for every man has an object; but what it is I can't divine."

"A very great object indeed, my dear Sir," replied the young officer, with a smile; "I wish to cultivate the acquaintance of an old friend of my father's — your brother here, who was kind enough to invite me."

"A very unprofitable sort of plant to cultivate," answered Mr. Croyland, in a voice quite loud enough to be heard by the whole room. "It won't pay tillage, I should think; but you know your own affairs best. Here, Edith, my love, I must make you better acquainted with my young fellow-traveller. Doubtless, he is perfectly competent to talk as much nonsense to you as any other young man about town, and has imported, for the express benefit of the young ladies in the country, all the sweet things and pretty speeches last in vogue. But he can, in his saner moments, and if you just let him know that you are not quite a fool, bestow upon you some small portion of common sense, which he has picked up, Heaven knows how! — He couldn't have it by descent; for he is an eldest son, and that portion of the family property is always reserved for the younger children."

Mrs. Barbara Croyland, who found that her brother Zachary was riding his horse somewhat hard, moved across the room — with the superfluity of whalebone which she had in her stays crackling at every step, as if expressly to attract attention — and, laying her hand on Mr. Croyland's arm, she whispered — "Now do, brother, be a little civil and kind. There's no use of hurting people's feelings; and, if Robert hasn't as much sense as you, there's no use you should always be telling him so."

"Pish! nonsense!" cried Mr. Croyland, "Hold your tongue, Bab. You're a good soul as ever lived, but a great fool into the bargain. So don't meddle. I should think you had burnt your fingers enough with it by this time."

"And I'm sure you're a good soul, too, if you would but let people know it," replied Mrs. Barbara, anxious to soften and

keep down all the little oddities and asperities of her family circle in the eyes of Sir Edward Digby.

But she only showed them the more by so doing; for Mr. Croyland was not to be caught by honey; and, besides, the character which she, in her simplicity, thought fit to attribute to him, was the very last upon the face of the earth which he coveted. Every man has his vanity; and it is an imp that takes an infinite variety of different forms, frequently the most hideous or the most absurd. Now Mr. Croyland's vanity lay in his oddity and acerbity. There was nothing on earth which he considered so foolish as good-nature; and he was heartily ashamed of the large portion with which Heaven had endowed him.

"I a good soul!" he exclaimed. "Let me tell you, Bab, you are very much mistaken in that, as in every other thing you say or do. I am nothing more nor less than a very cross, ill-tempered old man; and you know it quite well, if you wouldn't be a hypocrite."

"Well, I do believe you are," said the lady, with her own particular vanity mortified into a state of irritation, "and the only way is to let you alone."

While this conversation had been passing between brother and sister, Sir Edward Digby, taking advantage of the position in which they stood, and which masked his own operations from the rest of the party, bent down to speak a few words to Edith, who, whatever they were, looked up with a smile, faint and thoughtful indeed, but still expressing as much cheerfulness as her countenance ever showed. The topic which he spoke upon might be common-place, but what he said was said with grace, and had a degree of originality in it, mingled with courtliness and propriety of expression, which at once awakened attention and repaid it. It was not strong beer—it was not strong spirit—but it was like some delicate kind of wine, which has more power than the fineness of the flavour suffers to be apparent at the first taste.

Their conversation was not long, however; for by the time that the young gentleman and lady had exchanged a few sentences, and Mr. Croyland had finished his discussion with his sister, the name of Mr. Radford was announced; and Sir Edward Digby turned

quickly round to examine the appearance of the new comer. As he did so, however, his eye fell for a moment upon the countenance of Edith Croyland, and he thought he remarked an expression of anxiety not unmingled with pain, till the door closed after admitting a single figure, when a look of relief brightened her face, and she gave a glance across the room to her sister. The younger girl instantly rose; and while her father was busy receiving Mr. Radford with somewhat profuse attention, she gracefully crossed the room, and seating herself by Edith, laid her hand upon her sister's, whispering something to her with a kindly look.

Sir Edward Digby marked it all, and liked it; for there is something in the bottom of man's heart which has always a sympathy with affection; but he, nevertheless, did not fail to take a complete survey of the personage who entered, and whom I must now present to the reader, somewhat more distinctly than I could do by the moonlight. Mr. Richard Radford was a tall, thin, but large-boned man, with dark eyes and overhanging shaggy brows, a hook nose, considerably depressed towards the point, a mouth somewhat wide, and teeth very fine for his age, though somewhat straggling and sharklike. His hair was very thick, and apparently coarse; his arms long and powerful; and his legs, notwithstanding the meagreness of his body, furnished with very respectable calves. On the whole, he was a striking but not a prepossessing person; and there was a look of keenness and cupidity, we might almost say voracity, in his eye, with a bend in the brow, which would have given the observer an idea of great quickness of intellect and decision of character, if it had not been for a certain degree of weakness about the partly opened mouth, which seemed to be in opposition to the latter characteristic. He was dressed in the height of the mode, with large buckles in his shoes and smaller ones at his knees, a light dress-sword hanging not ungracefully by his side, and a profusion of lace and embroidery about his apparel.

Mr. Radford replied to the courtesies of Sir Robert Croyland with perfect self-possession — one might almost call it self-sufficiency — but with no grace and some stiffness. He was then introduced, in form, to Sir Edward Digby, bowing low, if that could be called a bow, which was merely an inclination of the

rigid spine, from a perpendicular position to an angle of forty-five with the horizon. The young officer's demeanour formed a very striking contrast with that of his new acquaintance, not much in favour of the latter; but he showed that, as Mr. Croyland had predicated of him, he was quite prepared to say a great many courteous nothings in a very civil and obliging tone. Mr. Radford declared himself delighted at the honour of making his acquaintance, and Sir Edward pronounced himself charmed at the opportunity of meeting him. Mr. Radford hoped that he was going to honour their poor place for a considerable length of time, and Sir Edward felt sure that the beauty of such scenery and the delights of such society, would be the cause of much pain to him when he was compelled to tear himself away.

A low but merry laugh from behind them, caused both the gentlemen to turn their heads; and they found the sparkling eyes of Zara Croyland fixed upon them. She instantly dropped her eyelids, however, and coloured a little, at being detected. It was evident enough that she had been weighing the compliments she heard, and estimating them at their right value, which made Mr. Radford look somewhat angry, but elicited nothing from Sir Edward Digby but a gay glance at the beautiful little culprit, which she caught, even through the thick lashes of her downcast eyes, and which served to reassure her.

Sir Robert Croyland himself was displeased; but Zara was in a degree a spoiled child, and had established for herself a privilege of doing what she liked, unscolded. To turn the conversation, therefore, Sir Robert, in a tone of great regard, inquired particularly after his young friend, Richard, and said, he hoped that they were to have the pleasure of seeing him.

"I trust so — I trust so, Sir Robert," replied Mr. Radford; "but you know I am totally unacquainted with his movements. He had gone away upon some business, the servants told me; and I waited as long as I could for him; but I did not choose to keep your dinner, Sir Robert; and if he does not choose to come in time, the young dog must go without. — Pray do not stop a moment for him."

"Business!" muttered Mr. Croyland — "either cheating the

the king's revenue, or making love to a milkmaid, I'll answer for him;" but the remark passed unnoticed, for Sir Robert Croyland, who was always anxious to drown his brother's somewhat too pertinent observations, without giving the nabob any offence, was loudly pressing Mr. Radford to let them wait for half an hour, in order to give time for the young gentleman's arrival.

His father, however, would not hear of such a proceeding; and the bell was rung, and dinner ordered. It was placed upon the table with great expedition; and the party moved towards the dining-room. Mr. Radford handed in the baronet's sister, who was, to say the truth, an enigma to him; for he himself could form no conception of her good-nature, simplicity, and kindness, and consequently thought that all the mischief she occasionally caused, must originate in well-concealed spite, which gave him a great reverence for her character. Sir Edward Digby, notwithstanding a hint from Sir Robert to take in his youngest daughter, advanced to Miss Croyland, and secured her, as he thought, for himself; while the brother of the master of the house followed with the fair Zara, leaving the clergyman and Sir Robert to come together. By a manœuvre on the part of Edith, however, favoured by her father, but nearly frustrated by the busy spirit of her aunt, Miss Croyland got placed between Sir Robert and the clergyman, while the youngest daughter of the house was seated by Sir Edward Digby, leaving a chair vacant between herself and her worthy parent for young Radford, when he should arrive.

All this being arranged, to the satisfaction of everybody but Sir Edward Digby, grace was said, after a not very decent hint from Sir Robert Croyland, that it ought not to be too long; and the dinner commenced with the usual attack upon soup and fish. It must not be supposed, however, because we have ventured to say that the arrangement was not to the satisfaction of Sir Edward Digby, that the young baronet was at all disinclined to enjoy his pretty little friend's society nearer than the opposite side of the table. Nor must it be imagined that his sage reflections, in regard to keeping himself out of danger, had at all made a coward of the gallant soldier. The truth is, he had a strong desire to study Edith Croyland: not on account of any benefit which that study

could be of to himself, but with other motives and views, which, upon the whole, were very laudable. He wished to see into her mind, and, by those slight indications which were all he could expect her to display — but which, nevertheless, to a keen observer, often tell a history better than a whole volume of details — to ascertain some facts, in regard to which he took a considerable interest. Being somewhat eager in his way, and not knowing how long he might find it either convenient or safe to remain in his present quarters, he had determined to commence the campaign as soon as possible; but, frustrated in his first attack, he determined to change his plan of operations, and besiege the fair Zara as one of the enemy's outworks. He accordingly laughed and talked with her upon almost every subject in the world during the first part of dinner, skilfully leading her up to the pursuits of her sister and herself in the country, in order to obtain a clear knowledge of their habits and course of proceeding, that he might take advantage of it at an after-period, for purposes of his own.

The art of conversation, when properly regarded, forms a regular system of tactics, in which, notwithstanding the various manœuvres of your adversary, and the desultory fire kept up by indifferent persons around, you still endeavour to carry the line of advance in the direction that you wish, and to frustrate every effort to turn it towards any point that may not be agreeable to you, rallying it here, giving it a bend there; presenting a sharp angle at one place, an obtuse one at another; and raising from time to time a barrier or a breastwork for the purpose of preventing the adverse force from turning your flank, and getting into your rear.

But the mischief was, in the present instance, that Sir Edward Digby's breastworks were too low for such an active opponent as Zara Croyland. They might have appeared a formidable obstacle in the way of a scientific opponent; but with all the rash valour of youth, which is so frequently successful where practice and experience fail, she walked straight up, and jumped over them, taking one line after another, till Sir Edward Digby found that she had nearly got into the heart of his camp. It was all so easy and natural, however, so gay and cheerful, that he could

not feel mortified, even at his own want of success; and though five times she darted away from the subject, and began to talk of other things, he still renewed it, expatiating upon the pleasures of a country life, and upon how much more rational, as well as agreeable it was, when compared to the amusements and whirl of the town.

Mr. Zachary Croyland, indeed, cut across them often, listening to what they said and sometimes smiling significantly at Sir Edward Digby, or at other times replying himself to what either of the two thought fit to discourse upon. Thus, then, when the young baronet was descanting sagely of the pleasures of the country, as compared with those of the town, good Mr. Croyland laughed merrily, saying, "You will soon have enough of it, Sir Edward; or else you are only deceiving that poor foolish girl; for what have you to do with the country? — you, who have lived the best part of your life in cities, and amongst their denizens. I dare say, if the truth were told now, you would give a guinea to be walking up the Mall, instead of sitting down here, in this old, crumbling, crazy house, speaking courteous nonsense to a pretty little milkmaid."

"Indeed, my dear Sir, you are very much mistaken," replied Sir Edward, gravely. "You judge all men by yourself; and because you are fond of cities, and the busy haunts of men, you think I must be so too."

"I fond of cities and the busy haunts of men!" cried Mr. Croyland, in a tone of high indignation; but a laugh that ran round the table, and in which even the worthy clergyman joined, showed the old gentleman that he had been taken in by Sir Edward's quietly-spoken jest; and at the same time his brother exclaimed, still laughing, "He hit you fairly there, Zachary. He has found out the full extent of your love for your fellow-creatures already."

"Well, I forgive him, I forgive him!" said Mr. Croyland, with more good humour than might have been expected. "I had forgotten that I had told him, four or five days ago, my hatred for all cities, and especially for that great mound of greedy emmets, which, unfortunately, is the capital of this country. I declare I never go into that vast den of iniquity, and mingle with the stream

of wretched-looking things that call themselves human, which all its doors are hourly vomiting forth, but they put me in mind of the white ants in India, just the same squalid-looking, active, and voracious vermin as themselves, running over everything that obstructs them, intruding themselves everywhere, destroying everything that comes in their way, and acting as an incessant torment to every one within reach. Certainly, the white ants are the less venemous of the two races, and somewhat prettier to look at; but still there's a wonderful resemblance."

"I don't at all approve of your calling me a milkmaid, uncle," said Zara, shaking her small delicate finger at Mr. Croyland, across the table. "It's very wrong and ungrateful of you. See if ever I milk your cow for you again!"

"Then I'll milk it myself, my dear," replied Mr. Croyland, with a good-humoured smile at his fair niece.

"You cannot, you cannot!" cried Zara. "Fancy, Sir Edward, what a picture it made when one day I went over to my uncle's, and found him with a frightful-looking black man, in a turban, whom he brought over from Heaven knows where, trying to milk a cow he had just bought, and neither of them able to manage it. My uncle was kneeling upon his cocked hat, amongst the long grass, looking, as he acknowledges, like a kangaroo; the cow had got one of her feet in the pail, kicking most violently; and the black man with a white turban round his head, was upon both his knees before her, beseeching her in some heathen language to be quiet. It was the finest sight I ever saw, and would have made a beautiful picture of the 'Worship of the Cow,' which is, as I am told, customary in the country where both the gentlemen came from."

"Zara, my dear — Zara!" cried Mrs. Barbara, who was frightened to death lest her niece should deprive herself of all share in Mr. Croyland's fortune. "You really should not tell such a story of your uncle."

But the worthy gentleman himself was laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks. "It's quite true — it's quite true!" he exclaimed, "and she did milk the cow, though we couldn't. The ill-tempered devil was as quiet as a lamb with her, though she is

so vicious with every male thing, that I have actually been obliged to have a woman in the cottage within a hundred yards of the house, for the express purpose of milking her."

"That 's what you should have done at first," said Mr. Radford, putting down the fork with which he had been diligently devouring a large plateful of fish. "Instead of having nothing but men about you, you should have had none but your coachman and footman, and all the rest women."

"Ay, and married my cook-maid," replied Mr. Croyland, sarcastically.

Sir Robert Croyland looked down into his plate with a quivering lip and a heavy brow, as if he did not well know whether to laugh or be angry. The clergyman smiled, Mr. Radford looked furious, but said nothing, and Mrs. Barbara exclaimed, "Oh, brother, you should not say such things! and besides, there are many cook-maids who are very nice, pretty, respectable people."

"Well, sister, I'll think of it," said Mr. Croyland, drily, but with a good deal of fun twinkling in the corners of his eyes.

It was too much for the light heart of Zara Croyland; and holding down her head, she laughed outright, although she knew that Mr. Radford had placed himself in the predicament of which her uncle spoke, though he had been relieved of the immediate consequence for some years.

What would have been the result is difficult to say; for Mr. Radford was waxing wroth; but at that moment the door was flung hastily open, and a young gentleman entered, of some three or four-and-twenty years of age, bearing a strong resemblance to Mr. Radford, though undoubtedly of a much more pleasant and graceful appearance. He was well dressed, and his coat, lined with white silk of the finest texture, was cast negligently back from his chest, with an air of carelessness which was to be traced in all the rest of his apparel. Everything he wore was as good as it could be, and everything became him; for he was well formed, and his movements were free and even graceful; but everything seemed to have been thrown on in a hurry, and his hair floated wild and straggling round his brow, as if neither comb nor brush had touched it for many hours. It might have been supposed that this sort of disar-

ray proceeded from haste when he found himself too late and his father gone; but there was an expression of reckless indifference about his face which led Sir Edward Digby to imagine that this apparent negligence was the habitual characteristic of his mind, rather than the effect of any accidental circumstance. His air was quite self-possessed, though hurried; and a flashing glance of his eye round the table, resting for a moment longer on Sir Edward Digby than on any one else, seemed directed to ascertain whether the party assembled was one that pleased him, before he chose to sit down to the board with them. He made no apology to Sir Robert Croyland for being too late, but shook hands with him in return for the very cordial welcome he met with, and then seated himself in the vacant chair, nodding to Miss Croyland familiarly, and receiving a cold inclination of the head in return. One of the servants inquired if he would take soup and fish; but he replied, abruptly, "No; bring me fish. No soup — I hate such messes."

In the meantime, by one of those odd turns which sometimes take place in conversation, Mr. Croyland, the clergyman, and Mr. Radford himself were once more talking together: the latter having apparently overcome his indignation at the nabob's tart rejoinder, in the hope and expectation of saying something still more biting to him in return. Like many a great general, however, he had not justly appreciated the power of his adversary as compared with his own strength. Mr. Croyland, soured at an early period of life, had acquired by long practice and experience a habit of repartee when his prejudices or his opinions (and they are very different things) were assailed, which was overpowering. A large fund of natural kindness and good humour formed a curious substratum for the acerbity which had accumulated above it, and his love of a joke would often show itself in a hearty peal of laughter, even at his own expense, when the attack upon him was made in a good spirit, by one for whom he had any affection or esteem. But if he despised or disliked his assailant, as was the case with Mr. Radford, the bitterest possible retort was sure to be given in the fewest possible words.

In order to lead away from the obnoxious subject, the clergyman returned to Mr. Croyland's hatred of London, saying, not

very advisedly perhaps, just as young Mr. Radford entered, "I cannot imagine, my dear Sir, why you have such an animosity to our magnificent capital, and to all that it contains, especially when we all know you to be as beneficent to individuals as you are severe upon the species collectively."

"My dear Cruden, you 'll only make a mess of it," replied Mr. Croyland. "The reason why I do sometimes befriend a poor scoundrel whom I happen to know, is because it is less pleasant for me to see a rascal suffer than to do what 's just by him. I have no will and no power to punish all the villany I see, otherwise my arm would be tired enough of flogging, in this county of Kent. But I do not understand why I should be called upon to like a great agglomeration of blackguards in a city, when I can have the same diluted in the country. Here we have about a hundred scoundrels to the square mile; in London we have a hundred to the square yard."

"Don't you think, Sir, that they may be but the worse scoundrels in the country because they are fewer?" demanded Mr. Radford.

"I am beginning to fancy so," answered Mr. Croyland, drily, "but I suppose in London the number makes up for the want of intensity."

"Well, it 's a very fine city," rejoined Mr. Radford; "the emporium of the world, the nurse of arts and sciences, the birth-place and the theatre of all that is great and majestic in the efforts of human intellect."

"And equally of all that is base and vile," answered his opponent; "it is the place to which all smuggled goods naturally tend, Radford. Every uncustomed spirit, every prohibited ware, physical and intellectual, there finds its mart; and the chief art that is practised is to cheat as cleverly as may be — the chief science learned, is how to defraud without being detected. We are improving in the country, daily — daily; but we have not reached the skill of London yet. Men make large fortunes in the country in a few years by merely cheating the Customs; but in London they make large fortunes in a few months by cheating everybody."

“So they do in India,” replied Mr. Radford, who thought he had hit the tender place.

“True, true!” cried Mr. Croyland; “and then we go and set up for country gentlemen, and cheat still. What rogues we are, Radford! — eh? I see you know the world. It is very well for me to say, I made all my money by curing men, not by robbing them. Never you believe it, my good friend. It is not in human nature, is it? No, no! tell that to the marines. No man ever made a fortune but by plunder, that’s a certain fact.”

The course of Sir Robert Croyland’s dinner-party seemed to promise very pleasantly at this juncture; but Sir Edward Digby, though somewhat amused, was not himself fond of sharp words, and had some compassion upon the ladies at the table. He therefore stepped in; and, without seeming to have noticed that there was anything passing between Mr. Radford and the brother of his host, except the most delicate courtesies, he contrived, by some well-directed questions in regard to India, to give Mr. Croyland an inducement to deviate from the sarcastic into the expatiative; and having set him cantering upon one of his hobbies, he left him to finish his excursion, and returned to a conversation which had been going on between him and the fair Zara, in somewhat of a low tone, though not so low as to show any mutual design of keeping it from the ears of those around. Young Radford had in the meantime been making up for the loss of time occasioned by his absence at the commencement of dinner, and he seemed undoubtedly to have a prodigious appetite. Not a word had passed from father to son, or son to father; and a stranger might have supposed them in no degree related to each other. Indeed, the young gentleman had hitherto spoken to nobody but the servant; and while his mouth was employed in eating, his quick, large eyes were directed to every face round the table in succession, making several more tours than the first investigating glance, which I have already mentioned, and every time stopping longer at the countenance of Sir Edward Digby than anywhere else. He now, however, seemed inclined to take part in that officer’s conversation with the youngest Miss Croyland, and did not appear quite pleased to find her attention so completely engrossed by a

stranger. To Edith he vouchsafed not a single word; but hearing the fair lady next to him reply to something which Sir Edward Digby had said, "Oh, we go out once or twice almost every day; sometimes on horseback; but more frequently to take a walk," he exclaimed, "Do you, indeed, Miss Zara? — why, I never meet you, and I am always running about the country. How is that, I wonder?"

Zara smiled, and replied, with an arch look, "Because fortune befriends us, I suppose, Mr. Radford;" but then, well knowing that he was not one likely to take a jest in good part, she added — "we don't go out to meet anybody, and therefore always take those paths where we are least likely to do so."

Still young Radford did not seem half to like her reply; but, nevertheless, he went on in the same tone, continually interrupting her conversation with Sir Edward Digby, and endeavouring, after a fashion not at all uncommon, to make himself agreeable by preventing people from following the course they are inclined to pursue. The young baronet rather humoured him than otherwise, for he wished to see as deeply as possible into his character. He asked him to drink wine with him; he spoke to him once or twice without being called upon to do so; and he was somewhat amused to see that the fair Zara was a good deal annoyed at the encouragement he gave to her companion on the left to join in their conversation.

He was soon satisfied, however, in regard to the young man's mind and character. Richard Radford had evidently received what is called a good education, which is, in fact, no education at all. He had been taught a great many things; he knew a good deal; but that which really and truly constitutes education was totally wanting. He had not learned how to make use of that which he had acquired, either for his own benefit or for that of society. He had been instructed, not educated, and there is the greatest possible difference between the two. He was shrewd enough, but selfish and conceited to a high degree, with a sufficient portion of pride to be offensive, with sufficient vanity to be irritable, with all the wilfulness of a spoiled child, and with that confusion of ideas in regard to plain right and wrong, which is

always consequent upon the want of moral training and over-indulgence in youth. To judge from his own conversation, the whole end and aim of his life seemed to be excitement; he spoke of field sports with pleasure; but the degree of satisfaction which he derived from each, appeared to be always in proportion to the danger, the activity, and the fierceness. Hunting he liked better than shooting, shooting than fishing, which latter he declared was only tolerable because there was nothing else to be done in the spring of the year. But upon the pleasures of the chase he would dilate largely, and he told several anecdotes of staking a magnificent horse here, and breaking the back of another there, till poor Zara turned somewhat pale, and begged him to desist from such themes.

"I cannot think how men can be so barbarous," she said. "Their whole pleasure seems to consist in torturing poor animals or killing them."

Young Radford laughed. "What were they made for?" he asked.

"To be used by man, I think, not to be tortured by him," the young lady replied.

"No torture at all," said her companion on the left. "The horse takes as much pleasure in running after the hounds as I do, and if he breaks his back, or I break my neck, it's our own fault. We have nobody to thank for it but ourselves. The very chance of killing one's self gives additional pleasure; and, when one pushes a horse at a leap, the best fun of the whole is the thought whether he will be able by any possibility to clear it or not. If it were not for hunting, and one or two other things of the sort, there would be nothing left for an English gentleman, but to go to Italy and put himself at the head of a party of banditti. That must be glorious work!"

"Don't you think, Mr. Radford," asked Sir Edward Digby, "that active service in the army might offer equal excitement, and a more honourable field?"

"Oh, dear no!" cried the young man. "A life of slavery compared with a life of freedom; to be drilled and commanded, and made a mere machine of, and sent about relieving guards and

pickets, and doing everything that one is told like a school-boy! I would not go into the army for the world. I'm sure if I did I should shoot my commanding officer within a month!"

"Then I would advise you not," answered the young baronet, "for after the shooting there would be another step to be taken which would not be quite so pleasant."

"Oh, you mean the hanging," cried young Radford, laughing; "but I would take care they should never hang me; for I could shoot myself as easily as I could shoot him; and I have a great dislike to strangulation. It's one of the few sorts of death that would not please me."

"Come, come, Richard!" said Sir Robert Croyland, in a nervous and displeased tone; "let us talk of some other subject. You will frighten the ladies from table before the cloth is off."

"It is very odd," said young Radford, in a low voice, to Sir Edward Digby, without making any reply to the master of the house — "it is very odd, how frightened old men are at the very name of death, when at the best they can have but two or three years to live."

The young officer did not reply, but turned the conversation to other things; and the wine having been liberally supplied, operated as it usually does, at the point where its use stops short of excess, in "making glad the heart of man;" and the conclusion of the dinner was much more cheerful and placable than the commencement.

The ladies retired within a few minutes after the desert was set upon the table; and it soon became evident to Sir Edward Digby, that the process of deep drinking, so disgracefully common in England at that time, was about to commence. He was by no means incapable of bearing as potent libations as most men; for occasionally, in those days, it was scarcely possible to escape excess without giving mortal offence to your entertainer; but it was by no means either his habit or his inclination so to indulge, and for this evening especially he was anxious to escape. He looked, therefore, across the table to Mr. Croyland for relief; and that gentleman, clearly understanding what he meant, gave him a slight nod, and finished his first glass of wine after dinner.

The bottles passed round again, and Mr. Croyland took his second glass; but after that he rose without calling much attention: a proceeding which was habitual with him. When, however, Sir Edward Digby followed his example, there was a general outcry. Every one declared it was too bad, and Sir Robert said, in a somewhat mortified tone, that he feared his wine was not so good as that to which his guest had been accustomed.

"It is only too good, my dear Sir," replied the young baronet, determined to cut the matter short, at once and for ever. "So good, indeed, that I have been induced to take two more glasses than I usually indulge in, and I consequently feel somewhat heated and uncomfortable. I shall go and refresh myself by a walk through your woods."

Several more efforts were made to induce him to stay; but he was resolute in his course; and Mr. Croyland also came to his aid, exclaiming. "Pooh, nonsense, Robert! let every man do as he likes. Have not I heard you, a thousand times, call your house Liberty Hall? A pretty sort of liberty, indeed, if a man must get beastly drunk because you choose to do so!"

"I do not intend to do any such thing, brother," replied Sir Robert, somewhat sharply; and in the meanwhile, during this discussion, Sir Edward Digby made his escape from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON entering the drawing-room, towards which Sir Edward Digby immediately turned his steps, he found it tenanted alone by Mrs. Barbara Croyland, who sat in the window with her back towards the door, knitting most diligently, with something pinned to her knee. As it was quite beyond the good lady's conception that any body would ever think of quitting the dining-room so early but her younger brother, no sooner did she hear a step than, jumping at conclusions as she usually did, she exclaimed aloud, "Isn't he a nice young man, brother Zachary? I think it will do quite well, if that —"

Sir Edward Digby would have given a great deal to hear the conclusion of the sentence; but his honour was as bright as his

sword; and he never took advantage of a mistake. "It is not your brother, Mrs. Croyland," he said; and then Mrs. Barbara starting up with a face like scarlet, tearing her gown at the same time by the tug she gave to the pin which attached her work to her knee, he added, with the most benevolent intentions, "I think he might have been made a very nice young man, if he had been properly treated in his youth. But I should imagine he was very wild and headstrong now."

Mrs. Barbara stared at him with a face full of wonder and confusion; for her own mind was so completely impressed with the subject on which she had begun to speak, that she by no means comprehended the turn that he intended to give it, but thought that he also was talking of himself, and not of young Radford. How it would have ended, no mere mortal can tell; for when once Mrs. Barbara got into a scrape, she floundered most awfully. Luckily, however, her brother was close enough behind Sir Edward Digby to hear all that passed, and he entered the room while the consternation was still fresh upon his worthy sister's countenance.

After gazing at her for a moment, with a look of sour merriment, Mr. Croyland exclaimed, "There! hold your tongue, Bab; you can't get your fish out of the kettle without burning your fingers! — Now, my young friend," he continued, taking Sir Edward Digby by the arm, and drawing him aside, "if you choose to be a great fool, and run the risk of falling in love with a pretty girl, whom my sister Barbara has determined you shall marry, whether you like it or not, and who herself, dear little soul, has no intention in the world but of playing you like a fish till you are caught, and then laughing at you, you will find the two girls walking in the wood behind the house, as they do every day. But if you don't like such amusement, you can stay here with me and Bab, and be instructed by her in the art and mystery of setting everything to wrongs with the very best intentions in the world."

"Thank you, my dear Sir," replied Sir Edward, smiling, "I think I should prefer the fresh air; and, as to the dangers

against which you warn me, I have no fears. The game of coquetry can be played by two."

"Ay, but woe to him who loses!" said Mr. Croyland, in a more serious tone. "But go along with you — go along! You are a rash young man; and if you will court your fate, you must."

The young baronet accordingly walked away, leaving Mrs. Barbara to recover from her confusion as she best might, and Mr. Croyland to scold her at his leisure, which Sir Edward did not in the slightest degree doubt he would do. It was a beautiful summer's afternoon in the end of August, the very last day of the month, the hour about a quarter to six, so that the sun had nearly to run a twelfth part of his course before the time of his setting. It was warm and cheerful, too, but with a freshness in the air, and a certain golden glow over the sky, which told that it was evening. Not wishing exactly to pass before the dining-room windows, Sir Edward endeavoured to find his way out into the wood behind the house by the stable and farm yards; but he soon found himself in a labyrinth from which it was difficult to extricate himself, and in the end was obliged to have recourse to a stout country lad, who was walking up towards the mansion, with a large pail of milk tugging at his hand, and bending in the opposite direction to balance the load. Right willingly, however, the youth set down the pail; and, leaving it to the tender mercies of some pigs, who were walking about in the yard and did not fail to inquire into the nature of its contents, he proceeded to show the way through the flower and kitchen gardens, by a small door in the wall, to a path which led out at once amongst the trees.

Now, Sir Edward Digby had not the slightest idea of which way the two young ladies had gone; and it was by no means improbable that, if he were left without pilotage in going and returning, he might lose his way in the wood; which, as I have said, was very extensive. But all true lovers are fond of losing their way; and as he had his sword by his side, he had not the slightest objection to that characteristic of an Amadis, having in reality a good deal of the knight-errant about him, and rather liking a little adventure, if it did not go too far. His adventures, indeed, were not destined that night to be very remarkable; for,

following the path about a couple of hundred yards, he was led directly into a good, broad, sandy road, in which he thought it would be impossible to go astray. A few clouds that passed over the sky from time to time cast their fitful and fanciful shadows upon the way; the trees waved on either hand; and, with a small border of green turf, the yellow path pursued its course through the wood, forming a fine but pleasant contrast in colour with the verdure of all the other things around. As he went on, too, the sky overhead, and the shades amongst the trees, began to assume a rosy hue as the day declined farther and farther; and the busy little squirrels, as numerous as mice, were seen running here and there up the trees and along the branches, with their bright black eyes staring at the stranger with a saucy activity very little mingled with fear. The young baronet was fond of such scenes, and fond of the somewhat grave musing which they very naturally inspire; and he therefore went on, alternately pondering and admiring, and very well contented with his walk, whether he met with his fair friends or not. Sir Edward, indeed, would not allow himself to fancy that he was by any means very anxious for Zara's company, or for Miss Croyland's either — for he was not in the slightest hurry either to fall in love or to acknowledge it to himself even if he were. With regard to Edith, indeed, he felt himself in no possible danger; for had he continued to think her, as he had done at first, more beautiful than her sister — which by this time he did not — he was still guarded in her case by feelings, which, to a man of his character, were as a triple shield of brass, or anything a great deal stronger.

He walked on, however, and he walked on; not, indeed, with a very slow pace, but with none of the eager hurry of youth after beauty; till at length, when he had proceeded for about half an hour, he saw cultivated fields and hedgerows at the end of the road he was pursuing, and soon after came to the open country, without meeting with the slightest trace of Sir Robert Croyland's daughters.

On the right hand, as he issued out of the wood, there was a small but very neat and picturesque cottage, with its little kitchen-garden and its flower-garden, its wild roses, and its vine.

"I have certainly missed them," said Sir Edward Digby to himself, "and I ought to make the best use of my time, for it won't do to stay here too long. Perhaps they may have gone into the cottage. Girls like these often seek an object in their walk, and visit this poor person or that;" and thus thinking, he advanced to the little gate, went into the garden, and knocked with his knuckles at the door of the house. A woman's voice bade him come in; and, doing so, he found a room, small in size, but corresponding in neatness and cleanliness with the outside of the place. It was tenanted by three persons — a middle-aged woman, dressed as a widow, with a fine and placid countenance, who was advancing towards the door as he entered; a very lovely girl of eighteen or nineteen, who bore a strong resemblance to the widow; and a stout, powerful, good-looking man, of about thirty, well dressed, though without any attempt at the appearance of a station above the middle class, with a clean, fine, checked shirt, having the collar cast back, and a black silk handkerchief tied lightly in what is usually termed a sailor's knot. The two latter persons were sitting very close together, and the girl was smiling gaily at something her companion had just said.

"Two lovers!" thought the young baronet; but, as that was no business of his, he went on to inquire of the good woman of the house, if she had seen some young ladies pass that way; and having named them, he added, to escape scandal, "I am staying at the house, and am afraid, if I do not meet with them, I shall not easily find my way back."

"They were here a minute ago, Sir," replied the widow, "and they went round to the east. They will take the Halden road back, I suppose. If you make haste, you will catch them easily."

"But which is the Halden road, my good lady?" asked Sir Edward Digby; and she, turning to the man who was sitting by her daughter, said, "I wish you would show the gentleman, Mr. Harding."

The man rose cheerfully enough — considering the circumstances — and led the young baronet with a rapid step, by a footpath that wound round the edge of the wood, to another broad

road about three hundred yards distant from that by which the young officer had come. Then, pointing with his hand, he said, "There they are, going as slow as a Dutch butter-tub. You can't miss them, or the road either; for it leads straight on."

Sir Edward Digby thanked him, and walked forward. A few rapid steps brought him close to the two ladies, who — though they looked upon every part of the wood as more or less their home, and consequently felt no fear — turned at the sound of a footfall so near; and the younger of the two smiled gaily, when she saw who it was.

"What! Sir Edward Digby!" she exclaimed. "In the name of all that is marvellous, how did you escape from the dining-room? Why, you will be accused of shirking the bottle, cowardice, and milksopism, and crimes and misdemeanours enough to forfeit your commission."

She spoke gaily; but Sir Edward Digby thought that the gaiety was not exactly sterling; for when first she turned, her face had been nearly as grave as her sister's. He answered, however, in the same tone, "I must plead guilty to all such misdemeanours; but if they are to be rewarded by such pleasure as that of a walk with you, I fear I shall often commit them."

"You must not pay us courtly compliments, Sir Edward," said Miss Croyland, "for we poor country people do not understand them. I hope, however, you left the party peaceable; for it promised to be quite the contrary at one time, and my uncle and Mr. Radford never agree."

"Oh, quite peaceable, I can assure you," replied Digby. "I retreated under cover of your uncle's movements. Perhaps, otherwise, I might not have got away so easily. He it was who told me where I should find you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Croyland, in a tone of surprise; and then, casting down her eyes, she fell into thought. Her sister, however, carried on the conversation in her stead, saying, "Well, you are the first soldier, Sir Edward, I ever saw, who left the table before night."

"They must have been soldiers who had seen little service, I should think," replied the young officer; "for a man called upon

often for active exertion, soon finds the necessity of keeping any brains he has got as clear as possible, in case they should be needed. In many countries where I have been, too, we could get no wine to drink, even if we wanted it. Such was the case in Canada, and in some parts of Germany."

"Have you served in Canada?" demanded Miss Croyland suddenly, raising her eyes to his face with a look of deep interest.

"Through almost the whole of the war," replied Sir Edward Digby, quietly, without noticing, even by a glance, the change of expression which his words had produced. He then paused for a moment, as if waiting for some other question; but both Miss Croyland and her sister remained perfectly silent, and the former turned somewhat pale.

As he saw that neither of his two fair companions were likely to carry the conversation a step further, the young officer proceeded, in a quiet and even light tone — "This part of the country," he continued, "is always connected in my mind with Canada; and, indeed, I was glad to accept your father's invitation at once, when he was kind enough to ask me to his house; for, in addition to the pleasure of making his personal acquaintance, I longed to see scenes which I had often heard mentioned with all the deep affection and delight which only can be felt by a fine mind for the spot in which our brighter years are passed."

The younger girl looked to her sister, but Edith Croyland was deadly pale, and said nothing; and Zara inquired in a tone to which she too evidently laboured to give the gay character of her usual demeanour, "Indeed, Sir Edward! May I ask who gave you such a flattering account of our poor country? He must have been a very foolish and prejudiced person — at least, so I fear you must think, now you have seen it."

"No, no! — oh, no!" cried Digby, earnestly, "anything but that. I had that account from a person so high-minded, so noble, so full of every generous quality of heart, and every fine quality of mind, that I was quite sure, ere I came here, I should find the people whom he mentioned, and the scenes which he described, all that he had stated; and I have not been disappointed, Miss Croyland."

"But you have not named him, Sir Edward," said Zara; "you are very tantalizing. Perhaps we may know him, and be sure we shall love him for his patriotism."

"He was an officer in the regiment to which I then belonged," answered the young baronet, "and my dearest friend. His name was Layton — a most distinguished man, who had already gained such a reputation, that, had his rank in the army admitted it, none could have been more desired to take the command of the forces when Wolfe fell on the heights of Abraham. He was too young, however, and had too little interest to obtain that position. — Miss Croyland, you seem ill. Let me give you my arm."

Edith bowed her head quietly, and leaned upon her sister, but answered not a word; and Zara gave a glance to Sir Edward Digby which he read aright. It was a meaning, a sort of relying and imploring look, as if she would have said, "I beseech you, say no more; she cannot bear it." And the young officer abruptly turned the conversation, observing, "The day has been very hot, Miss Croyland. You have walked far, and over-fatigued yourself."

"It is nothing — it is nothing," answered Edith, with a deep-drawn breath; "it will be past in a moment, Sir Edward. I am frequently thus."

"Too frequently," murmured Zara, gazing at her sister; and Sir Edward Digby replied, "I am sure, if such be the case, you should consult some physician."

Zara shook her head with a melancholy smile, while her sister walked on, leaning upon her arm in silence, with her eyes bent towards the ground, as if in deep thought. "I fear that no physician would do her good," said the younger lady, in a low voice; "the evil is now confirmed."

"Nay," replied Digby, gazing at her, "I think I know one who could cure her entirely."

His look said more than his words; and Zara fixed her eyes upon his face for an instant with an inquiring glance. The expression then suddenly changed to one of bright intelligence, and she answered, "I will make you give me his name to-morrow, Sir Edward. Not now — not now! I shall forget it."

Sir Edward Digby was not slow in taking a hint; and he consequently made no attempt to bring the conversation back to the subject which had so much affected Miss Croyland; but lest a dead silence should too plainly mark that he saw into the cause of the faintness which had come over her, he went on talking to her sister; and Zara soon resumed, at least to all appearance, her own light spirits again. But Digby had seen her under a different aspect, which was known to few besides her sister; and to say the truth, though he had thought her sparkling frankness very charming, yet the deeper and tenderer feelings which she had displayed towards Edith were still more to his taste.

"She is not the light coquette her uncle represents her," he thought, as they walked on: "there is a true and feeling heart beneath — one whose affections, if strongly excited and then disappointed, might make her as sad and cheerless as this other poor girl."

He had not much time to indulge either in such meditations or in conversation with his fair companion; for, when they were within about a mile of the house, old Mr. Croyland was seen advancing towards them with his usual brisk air and quick pace.

"Well, young people, well," he said, coming forward, "I bring the soberness of age to temper the lightness of youth."

"Oh, we are all very sober, uncle," replied Zara. "It is only those who stay in the house drinking wine who are otherwise."

"I have not been drinking wine, saucy girl," answered Mr. Croyland; "but come, Edith, I want to speak with you; and, as the road is too narrow for four, we'll pair off, as the rascals who ruin the country in the House of Commons term it. Troop on, Miss Zara. There's a gallant cavalier who will give you his arm, doubtless, if you will ask it."

"Indeed I shall do no such thing," replied the fair lady, walking on; and, while Edith and her uncle came slowly after, Sir Edward Digby and the youngest Miss Croyland proceeded on their way, remaininig silent for some minutes, though each, to say the truth, was busily thinking how the conversation which had been interrupted might best be renewed. It was Zara who spoke

first, however, looking suddenly up in her companion's face with one of her bright and sparkling smiles, and saying, "It is a strange house, is it not, Sir Edward? and we are a strange family?"

"Nay, I do not see that," replied the young officer. "With every new person whose acquaintance we make, we are like a traveller for the first time in a foreign country, and must learn the secrets of the land before we can find our way rightly."

"Oh, secrets enough here!" cried Zara. "Every one has his secret but myself. I have none, thank God! My good father is full of them; Edith, you see, has hers; my uncle is loaded with one even now, and eager to disburden himself; but my aunt's are the most curious of all, for they are everlasting; and not only that, but though most profound, they are sure to be known in five minutes to the whole world. Try to conceal them how she may, they are sure to drop out before the day is over; and, whatever good schemes she may have against any one, no defence is needed, for they are sure to frustrate themselves. — What are you laughing at, Sir Edward? Has she begun upon you already?"

"Nay, not exactly upon me," answered Sir Edward Digby. "She certainly did let drop some words which showed me, she had some scheme in her head, though whom it referred to, I am at a loss to divine."

"Nay, nay, now you are not frank," cried the young lady. "Tell me this moment, if you would have me hold you good knight and true! Was it me or Edith that it was all about? Nay, do not shake your head, my good friend, for I will know, depend upon it; and if you do not tell me, I will ask my aunt myself —"

"Nay, for Heaven's sake, do not!" exclaimed Sir Edward. "You must not make your aunt think that I am a tell-tale."

"Oh, I know — I know!" exclaimed the fair girl, clapping her hands eagerly — "I can divine it all in a minute. She has been telling you what an excellent good girl Zara Croyland is, and what an admirable wife she would make, especially for any man moving in the highest society, and hinting, moreover, that she is fond of military men, and, in short, that Sir Edward Digby could not do better. I know it all — I know it all, as well as if I had

heard it! But now, my dear Sir," she continued, in a graver tone, "put all such nonsense out of your head, if you would have us such good friends as I think we may be. Leave my dear aunt's schemes to unravel and defeat themselves, or only think of them as a matter of amusement, and do not for a moment believe that Zara Croyland has either any share in them, or any design of captivating you or any other man whatsoever; for I tell you fairly, and at once, that I never intend — that nothing would induce me — no, not if my own dearest happiness depended upon it — to marry, and leave poor Edith to endure all that she may be called upon to undergo. I will talk to you more about her another time; for I think that you already know something beyond what you have said to-day; but we are too near the house now, and I will only add, that I have spoken frankly to Sir Edward Digby, because I believe, from all I have seen and all I have heard, that he is incapable of misunderstanding such conduct."

"You do me justice, Miss Croyland," replied the young officer, much gratified; "but you have spoken under a wrong impression in regard to your aunt. I did not interrupt you, for what you said was too pleasing, too interesting not to induce me to let you go on; but I can assure you that what I said was perfectly true, and that though some words which your aunt dropped accidentally showed me that she had some scheme on foot, she said nothing to indicate what it was."

"Well, never mind it," answered the young lady. "We now understand each other, I trust; and, after this, I do not think you will easily mistake me, though, if what I suppose is true, I may have to do a great many extraordinary things with you, Sir Edward — seek your society when you may not be very willing to grant it, consult you, rely upon you, confide in you in a way that few women would do, except with a brother or an acknowledged lover, which I beg you to understand you are on no account to be; and I, on my part, will promise that I will not misunderstand you either, nor take anything that you may do, at my request, for one very dear to me," (and she gave a glance over her shoulder towards her sister, who was some way behind,) "as anything but

a sign of your having a kind and generous heart. So now that's all settled."

"There is one thing, Miss Croyland," replied Digby, gravely, "that you will find very difficult to do, though you say you will try it, namely, to seek my society when I am unwilling to give it."

"Nay, nay, I will have no such speeches," cried Zara Croyland, "or I have done with you! I never could put any trust in a man who said civil things to me."

"What, not if he sincerely thought them?" demanded her companion.

"Then I would rather he continued to think them without speaking them," answered the young lady. "If you did but know, Sir Edward, how sickened and disgusted a poor girl in the country soon gets with flattery that means nothing, from men who insult her understanding by thinking that she can be pleased with such trash, you would excuse me for being rude and uncivilized enough to wish never to hear a smooth word from any man whom I am inclined to respect."

"Very well," answered the young baronet, laughing, "to please you, I will be as brutal as possible, and if you like it, scold you as sharply as your uncle, if you say or do anything that I disapprove of."

"Do, do!" cried Zara; "I love him and esteem him, though he does not understand me in the least; and I would rather a great deal have his conversation, sharp and snappish as it seems to be, than all the honey or milk and water of any of the smart young men in the neighbourhood. But here we are at the house; and only one word more as a warning, and one word as a question; first, do not let any of my good aunt's schemes embarrass you in anything you have to do or say. Walk straight through them as if they did not exist. Take your own course, without, in the least degree, attending to what she says for or against."

"And what is the question?" demanded Sir Edward, as they were now mounting the steps to the terrace.

"Simply this," replied the fair lady, — "are you not acquainted with more of Edith's history than the people here are aware of?"

"I am," answered Digby; "and to see more of her, to speak

with her for a few minutes in private, if possible, was the great object of my coming hither."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Zara, giving him a bright and grateful smile. "Be guided by me, and you shall have the opportunity. But I must speak with you first myself, that you may know all. I suppose you are an early riser?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Sir Edward; but he added no more; for at that moment they were overtaken by Edith and Mr. Croyland; and the whole party entered the house together.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE is a strange similarity — I had nearly called it an affinity — between the climate of any country and the general character of its population; and there is a still stronger and more commonly remarked resemblance between the changes of the weather and the usual course of human life. From the atmosphere around us, and from the alterations which affect it, poets and moralists both, have borrowed a large store of figures; and the words, clouds, and sunshine, light breezes, and terrible storms, are terms as often used to express the variations in man's condition as to convey the ideas to which they were originally applied. But it is the affinity between the climate and the people of which I wish to speak. The sunny lightness of the air of France, the burning heat of Italy and Spain, the cold dullness of the skies of Holland, contrast as strongly with the climate in which we live, as the characters of the several nations amongst themselves; and the fiercer tempests of the south, the more foggy and heavy atmosphere of the north, may well be taken as some compensation for the continual mutability of the weather in our own most changeable air. The differences are not so great here as in other lands. We escape, in general, the tornado and the hurricane, we know little of the burning heat of summer, or the intense cold of winter, as they are experienced in other parts of the world; but at all events, the changes are much more frequent; and we seldom have either a long lapse of sunny days, or a long continued season of frost, without interruption. So it is, too, with the people.

Moveable and fluctuating as they always are, seeking novelty, disgusted even with all that is good as soon as they discover that it is old, our laws, our institutions, our very manners are continually undergoing some change, though rarely, very rarely indeed, is it brought about violently and without due preparation. Sometimes it will occur, indeed, both morally and physically, that a great and sudden alteration takes place, and a rash and vehement proceeding will disturb the whole country, and seem to shake the very foundations of society. In the atmosphere, too, clouds and storms will gather in a few hours, and darken the whole heaven.

The latter was the case during the first night of Sir Edward Digby's stay at Harbourne House. The evening preceding, as well as the day, had been warm and sunshiny; but about nine o'clock the wind suddenly chopped round to the southward, and when Sir Edward woke on the following morning, as he usually did, about six, he found a strong breeze blowing and rattling the casements of the room, and the whole atmosphere loaded with a heavy sea-mist filled with saline particles, borne over Romney Marsh to the higher country, in which the house was placed.

"A pleasant day for partridge-shooting," he thought, as he rose from his bed; "what variations there are in this climate." But nevertheless, he opened the window and looked out, when, somewhat to his surprise, he saw fifteen or sixteen horses moving along the road, heavily laden, with a number of men on horse-back following, and eight or ten on foot driving the weary beasts along. They were going leisurely enough; there was no affectation of haste or concealment; but yet all that the young officer had heard of the county and of the habits of its denizens, led him naturally to suppose that he had a gang of smugglers before him, escorting from the coast some contraband goods lately landed.

He had soon a more unpleasant proof of the lawless state of that part of England; for as he continued to lean out of the window, saying to himself, "Well, it is no business of mine," he saw two or three of the men pause; and a moment after, a voice shouted — "Take that, old Croyland, for sending me to gaol last April."

The wind bore the sounds to his ear, and made the words distinct; and scarcely had they been spoken, when a flash broke through the misty air, followed by a loud report, and a ball whizzed through the window, just above his head, breaking one of the panes of glass, and lodging in the cornice at the other side of the room.

"Very pleasant!" said Sir Edward Digby to himself; but he was a somewhat rash young man, and he did not move an inch, thinking — "the vagabonds shall not have to say they frightened me."

They showed no inclination to repeat the shot, however, riding on at a somewhat accelerated pace; and as soon as they were out of sight, Digby withdrew from the window, and began to dress himself. He had not given his servant, the night before, any orders to call him at a particular hour; but he knew that the man would not be later than half-past six; and before he appeared, the young officer was nearly dressed.

"Here, Somers," said his master, "put my gun together, and have everything ready if I should like to go out to shoot. After that I've a commission for you, something quite in your own way, which I know you will execute capitally."

"Quite ready, Sir," said the man, putting up his hand to his head. "Always ready to obey orders."

"We want intelligence of the enemy, Somers," continued his master. "Get me every information you can obtain regarding young Mr. Radford, where he goes, what he does, and all about him."

"Past, present, or to come, Sir?" demanded the man.

"All three," answered his master. "Everything you can learn about him, in short — birth, parentage, and education."

"I shall soon have to add his last dying speech and confession, I think, Sir," said the man; "but you shall have it all before night — from the loose gossip of the post-office down to the full, true, and particular account of his father's own butler. But bless my soul, there's a hole through the window, Sir."

"Nothing but a musket-ball, Somers," answered his master, carelessly. "You've seen such a thing before, I fancy."

"Yes, Sir, but not often in a gentleman's bed-room," replied the man. "Who could send it in here, I wonder?"

"Some smugglers, I suppose they were," replied Sir Edward, "who took me for Sir Robert Croyland, as I was leaning out of the window, and gave me a ball as they passed. I never saw a worse shot in my life; for I was put up like a target, and it went a foot and a half above my head. Give me those boots, Somers;" and having drawn them on, Sir Edward Digby descended to the drawing-room, while his servant commented upon his coolness, by saying, "Well, he 's a devilish fine young fellow, that master of mine, and ought to make a capital general some of these days!"

In the drawing-room, Sir Edward Digby found nobody but a pretty country girl in a mob-cap sweeping out the dust; and leaving her to perform her functions undisturbed by his presence, he sauntered through a door which he had seen open the night before, exposing part of the interior of a library. That room was quite vacant, and as the young officer concluded that between it and the drawing-room must lie the scene of his morning's operations, he entertained himself with taking down different books, looking into them for a moment or two, reading a page here and a page there, and then putting them up again. He was in no mood, to say the truth, either for serious study or light reading. Gay would not have amused him; Locke would have driven him mad.

He knew not well why it was, but his heart beat when he heard a step in the neighbouring room. It was nothing but the housemaid, as he was soon convinced, by her letting the dust-pan drop and making a terrible clatter. He asked himself what his heart could be about, to go on in such a way, simply because he was waiting, in the not very vague expectation of seeing a young lady, with whom he had to talk of some business, in which neither of them were personally concerned.

"It must be the uncertainty of whether she will come or not," he thought; "or else the secrecy of the thing;" and yet he had, often before, had to wait with still more secrecy and still more uncertainty, on very dangerous and important occasions, without

feeling any such agitation of his usually calm nerves. She was a very pretty girl, it was true, with all the fresh graces of youth about her, light and sunshine in her eyes, health and happiness on her cheeks and lips, and

"La grace encore plus belle que la beauté"

in every movement. But then, they perfectly understood each other; there was no harm, there was no risk, there was no reason why they should not meet.

Did they perfectly understand each other? Did they perfectly understand themselves? It is a very difficult question to answer; but one thing is very certain — that, of all things upon this earth, the most gullible is the human heart; and when it thinks it understands itself best, it is almost always sure to prove a greater fool than ever.

Sir Edward Digby did not altogether like his own thoughts; and therefore, after waiting for a quarter of an hour, he walked out into one of the little passages, which we have already mentioned, running from the central corridor towards a door or window in the front, between the library and what was called the music-room. He had not been there a minute when a step — very different from that of the housemaid — was heard in the neighbouring room; and, as the officer was turning thither, he met the younger Miss Croyland coming out, with a bonnet — or hat, as it was then called, — hanging on her arm by the ribbons.

She held out her hand, frankly, towards him, saying, in a low tone, "You must think this all very strange, Sir Edward, and perhaps very improper. I have been taxing myself about it all night; but yet I was resolved I would not lose the opportunity, trusting to your generosity to justify me, when you hear all."

"It requires no generosity, my dear Miss Croyland," replied the young baronet; "I am already aware of so much, and see the kind and deep interest you take in your sister so clearly, that I fully understand and appreciate your motives."

"Thank you — thank you," replied Zara, warmly; "that sets my mind at rest. But come out upon the terrace. There, seen by all the world, I shall not feel as if I were plotting;" and

she unlocked the glass door at the end of the passage. Sir Edward Digby followed close upon her steps; and when once fairly on the esplanade before the house, and far enough from open doors and windows not to be overheard, they commenced their walk backwards and forwards.

It was quite natural that both should be silent for a few moments; for where there is much to say, and little time to say it in, people are apt to waste the precious present — or, at least, a part — in considering how it may best be said. At length the lady raised her eyes to her companion's face, with a smile more melancholy and embarrassed than usually found place upon her sweet lips, asking, "How shall I begin, Sir Edward? — Have you nothing to tell me?"

"I have merely to ask questions," replied Digby; "yet, perhaps that may be the best commencement. I am aware, my dear Miss Croyland, that your sister has loved, and has been as deeply beloved as woman ever was by man. I know the whole tale; but what I seek now to learn is this — does she or does she not retain the affection of her early youth? Do former days and former feelings dwell in her heart as still existing things? or are they but as sad memories of a passion passed away, darkening instead of lighting the present, — or perhaps as a tie which she would fain shake off, and which keeps her from a brighter fate hereafter?"

He spoke solemnly, earnestly, with his whole manner changed; and Zara gazed in his face eagerly and inquiringly as he went on, her face glowing, but her look becoming less sad, till it beamed with a warm and relieved smile at the close. "I was right, and she was wrong" — she said, at length, as if speaking to herself. "But to answer your question, Sir Edward Digby," she continued, gravely. "You little know woman's heart, or you would not put it — I mean the heart of a true and unspoiled woman, a woman worthy of the name. When she loves, she loves for ever — and it is only when death or unworthiness takes from her him she loves, that love becomes a memory. You cannot yet judge of Edith, and therefore I forgive you for asking such a thing; but she is all that is noble, and good, and bright; and

Heaven pardon me, if I almost doubt that she was meant for happiness below — she seems so fitted for a higher state!”

The tears rose in her eyes as she spoke; but Sir Edward feared interruption, and went on, asking, somewhat abruptly perhaps, “What made you say, just now, that you were right and she was wrong?”

“Because she thought that he was dead, and that you came to announce it to her,” Zara replied. “You spoke of him in the past, you always said, ‘he was;’ you said not a word of the present.”

“Because I knew not what were her present feelings,” answered Digby. “She has never written — she has never answered one letter. All his have been returned in cold silence to his agents, addressed in her own hand. And then her father wrote to —”

“Stay, stay!” cried Zara, putting her hand to her head — “addressed in her own hand? It must have been a forgery! Yet, no — perhaps not. She wrote to him twice; once just after he went, and once in answer to a message. The last letter I gave to the gardener myself, and bade him post it. That, too, was addressed to his agent’s house. Can they have stopped the letters and used the covers?”

“It is probable,” answered Digby, thoughtfully. “Did she receive none from him?”

“None — none,” replied Zara, decidedly. “All that she has ever heard of him was conveyed in that one message; but she doubted not, Sir Edward. She knew him, it seems, better than he knew her.”

“Neither did he doubt her,” rejoined her companion, “till circumstance after circumstance occurred to shake his confidence. Her own father wrote to him — now three years ago — to say that she was engaged, by her own consent, to this young Radford, and to beg that he would trouble her peace no more by fruitless letters.”

“Oh, Heaven!” cried Zara, “did my father say that?”

“He did,” replied Sir Edward. “And more: everything that poor Layton has heard since his return has confirmed the tale. He

inquired, too curiously for his own peace — first, whether she was yet married; next, whether she was really engaged; and every one gave but one account.”

“How busy they have been!” said Zara, thoughtfully. “Whoever said it, it is false, Sir Edward; and he should not have doubted her more than she doubted him.”

“She, you admit, had one message,” answered Digby; “he had none; and yet he held a lingering hope — trust would not altogether be crushed out. Can you tell me the tenour of the letters which she sent?”

“Nay, I did not read them,” replied his fair companion; “but she told me that it was the same story still: that she could not violate her duty to her parent; but that she should ever consider herself pledged and plighted to him beyond recall, by what had passed between them.”

“Then there is light at last,” said Digby, with a smile. “But what is this story of young Radford? Is he, or is he not, her lover? He seemed to pay her little attention, — more, indeed, to yourself.”

The gay girl laughed. “I will tell you all about it,” she answered. “Richard Radford is not her lover. He cares as little about her as about the Queen of England, or any body he has never seen; and, as you say, he would perhaps pay me the compliment of selecting me rather than Edith, if there was not a very cogent objection: Edith has forty thousand pounds settled upon herself by my mother’s brother, who was her godfather; I have nothing, or next to nothing — some three or four thousand pounds, I believe; but I really don’t know. However, this fortune of my poor sister’s is old Radford’s object; and he and my father have settled it between them, that the son of the one should marry the daughter of the other. What possesses my father, I cannot divine; for he must condemn old Radford, and despise the young one; but certain it is that he has pressed Edith, nearly to cruelty, to give her hand to a man she scorns and hates — and presses her still. It would be worse than it is, I fear, were it not for young Radford himself, who is not half so eager as his father, and does not wish to hurry matters on. — I

may have some small share in the business," she continued, laughing again, but colouring at the same time; "for, to tell the truth, Sir Edward, having nothing else to do, and wishing to relieve poor Edith as much as possible, I have perhaps foolishly, perhaps even wrongly, drawn this wretched young man away from her whenever I had an opportunity. I do not think it was coquetry, as my uncle calls it — nay, I am sure it was not; for I abhor him as much as any one; but I thought that as there was no chance of my ever being driven to marry him, I could bear the infliction of his conversation better than my poor sister."

"The motive was a kind one, at all events," replied Sir Edward Digby; "but then I may firmly believe that there is no chance whatever of Miss Croyland giving her hand to Richard Radford?"

"None — none whatever," answered his fair companion. But at that point of their conversation one of the windows above was thrown up, and the voice of Mrs. Barbara was heard exclaiming — "Zara, my love, put on your hat; you will catch cold if you walk in that way, with your hat on your arm, in such a cold, misty morning!"

Miss Croyland looked up, nodding to her aunt; and doing as she was told, like a very good girl as she was. But the next instant she said, in a low tone, "Good Heaven! there is his face at the window! My unlucky aunt has roused him by calling to me; and we shall not be long without him."

"Who do you mean?" asked the young officer, turning his eyes towards the house, and seeing no one.

"Young Radford," answered Zara. "Did you not know that they had to carry him to bed last night, unable to stand? So my maid told me; and I saw his face just now at the window, next to my aunt's. We shall have little time, Sir Edward, for he is as intrusive as he is disagreeable; so tell me at once what I am to think regarding poor Harry Layton. Does he still love Edith? Is he in a situation to enable him to seek her, without affording great, and what they would consider reasonable, causes of objection?"

"He loves her as deeply and devotedly as ever," replied Sir Edward Digby; "and all I have to tell him will but, if possible, increase that love. Then as to his situation, he is now a superior

officer in the army, highly distinguished, commanding one of our best regiments, and sharing largely in the late great distribution of prize-money. There is no position that can be filled by a military man to which he has not a right to aspire; and, moreover, he has already received, from the gratitude of his king and his country, the high honour —”

But he was not allowed to finish his sentence; for Mrs. Barbara Croyland, who was most unfortunately matutinal in her habits, now came out with a shawl for her fair niece, and was uncomfortably civil to Sir Edward Digby, inquiring how he had slept, whether he had been warm enough, whether he liked two pillows or one, and a great many other questions, which lasted till young Radford made his appearance at the door, and then, with a pale face and sullen brow, came out and joined the party on the terrace.

“Well,” said Mrs. Barbara — now that she had done as much mischief as possible — “I’ll just go in and make breakfast, as Edith must set out early, and Mr. Radford wants to get home to shoot.”

“Edith set off early?” exclaimed Zara; “why, where is she going, my dear aunt?”

“Oh, I have just been settling it all with your papa, my love,” replied Mrs. Barbara. “I thought she was looking ill yesterday, and so I talked to your uncle last night. He said he would be very glad to have her with him for a few days; but as he expects a Captain Osborn before the end of the week, she must come at once; and Sir Robert says she can have the carriage after breakfast, but that it must be back by one.”

Zara cast down her eyes, and the whole party, as if by common consent, took their way back to the house. As they passed in, however, and proceeded towards the dining-room, where the table was laid for breakfast, Zara found a moment to say to Sir Edward Digby, in a low tone, “Was ever anything so unfortunate! I will try to stop it if I can.”

“Not so unfortunate as it seems,” answered the young baronet, in a whisper; “let it take its course. I will explain hereafter.”

“Whispering! whispering!” said young Radford, in a rude tone, and with a sneer curling his lip.

Zara's cheek grew crimson; but Digby turned upon him sharply, demanding, "What is that to you, Sir? Pray make no observations upon my conduct, for depend upon it I shall not tolerate any insolence."

At that moment, however, Sir Robert Croyland appeared; and whatever might have been Richard Radford's intended reply, it was suspended upon his lips.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE I proceed farther with the events of that morning, I must return for a time to the evening which preceded it. It was a dark and somewhat dreary night, when Mr. Radford, leaving his son stupidly drunk at Sir Robert Croyland's, proceeded to the hall door to mount his horse; and as he pulled his large riding-boots over his shoes and stockings, and looked out, he regretted that he had not ordered his carriage. "Who would have thought," he said, "that such a fine day would have ended in such a dull evening?"

"It often happens, my dear Radford," replied Sir Robert Croyland, who stood beside him, "that everything looks fair and prosperous for a time; then suddenly the wind shifts, and a gloomy night succeeds."

Mr. Radford was not well-pleased with the homily. It touched upon that which was a sore subject with him at that moment; for, to say the truth, he was labouring under no light apprehensions regarding the result of certain speculations of his. He had lately lost a large sum in one of these wild adventures — far more than was agreeable to a man of his money-getting turn of mind; and though he was sanguine enough, from long success, to embark, like a determined gambler, a still larger amount in the same course, yet the first shadow of reverse which had fallen upon him, brought home and applied to his own situation the very commonplace words of Sir Robert Croyland; and he began to fancy that the bright day of his prosperity might be indeed over, and a dark and gloomy night about to succeed.

As we have said, therefore, he did not at all like the baronet's

homily; and, as very often happens with men of his disposition, he felt displeased with the person whose words alarmed him. Murmuring something, therefore, about its being "a devilish ordinary circumstance indeed," he strode to the door, scarcely wishing the baronet good night, and mounted a powerful horse, which was held ready for him. He then rode forward, followed by two servants on horseback, proceeding slowly at first, but getting into a quicker pace when he came upon the parish road, and trotting on hard along the edge of Harbourne Wood. He had drunk as much wine as his son; but his hard and well-seasoned head was quite insensible to the effects of strong beverages, and he went on revolving all probable contingencies, somewhat sullen and out of humour with all that had passed during the afternoon, and taking a very unpromising view of everybody and everything.

"I've a notion," he thought, "that old scoundrel Croyland is playing fast and loose about his daughter's marriage with my son. He shall repent it if he do; and if Dick does not make the girl pay for all her airs and coldness when he's got her, he's no son of mine. He seems as great a fool as she is, though, and makes love to her sister without a penny, never saying a word to a girl who has forty thousand pounds. The thing shall soon be settled one way or another, however. I'll have a conference with Sir Robert on Friday, and bring him to book. I'll not be trifled with any longer. Here we have been kept more than four years waiting till the girl chooses to make up her mind, and I'll not stop any longer. It shall be, yes or no, at once."

He was still busy with such thoughts when he reached the angle of Harbourne Wood, and a loud voice exclaimed, "Hi! Mr. Radford!"

"Who the devil are you?" exclaimed that worthy gentleman, pulling in his horse, and at the same time putting his hand upon one of the holsters, which every one at that time carried at his saddle bow.

"Harding, Sir," answered the voice — "Jack Harding; and I want to speak a word with you."

At the same time the man walked forward; and Mr. Radford immediately dismounting, gave his horse to the servants, and

told them to lead him quietly on till they came to Tiffenden. Then pausing till the sound of the hoofs became somewhat faint, he asked, with a certain degree of alarm, "Well, Harding, what's the matter? What has brought you up in such a hurry to-night?"

"No great hurry, Sir," answered the smuggler, "I came up about four o'clock; and finding that you were dining at Sir Robert's, I thought I would look out for you as you went home, having something to tell you. I got an inkling last night, that, some how or another, the people down at Hythe have some suspicion that you are going to try something, and I doubt that boy very much."

"Indeed! indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Radford, evidently under great apprehension. "What have they found out, Harding?"

"Why, not much, I believe," replied the smuggler; "but merely that there's something in the wind, and that you have a hand in it."

"That's bad enough — that's bad enough," repeated Mr. Radford. "We must put it off, Harding. We must delay it, till this has blown by."

"No, I think not, Sir," answered the smuggler. "It seems to me, on the contrary, that we ought to hurry it; and I'll tell you why. You see, the wind changed about five, and if I'm not very much mistaken, we shall have a cloudy sky and dirty weather for the next week at least. That's one thing; but then another is this, the Ramleys are going to make a run this very night. Now, I know that the whole affair is blown; and though they may get the goods ashore they wont carry them far. I told them so, just to be friendly; but they wouldn't listen, and you know their rash way. Bill Ramley answered, they would run the goods in broad daylight, if they liked, that there was not an officer in all Kent who would dare to stop them. Now, I know that they will be caught to-morrow morning, somewhere up about your place. I rather think, too, your son has a hand in the venture; and if I were you, I would do nothing to make people believe that it wasn't my own affair altogether. Let them think what they please; and then they are not so likely to be on the look-out."

"I see — I see," cried Mr. Radford. "If they catch these

fellows, and think that this is my venture, they will never suspect another. It's a good scheme. We had better set about it to-morrow night."

"I don't know," answered Harding. "That cannot well be done, I should think. First, you must get orders over to the vessel to stand out to sea; then you must get all your people together, and one half of them are busy upon this other scheme, the Ramleys and young Chittenden, and him they call the major, and all their parties. You must see what comes of that first; for one half of them may be locked up before to-morrow night."

"That's unfortunate, indeed!" said Mr. Radford, thoughtfully.

"One must take a little ill luck with plenty of good luck," observed Harding; "and it's fortunate enough for you that these wild fellows will carry through this mad scheme, when they know they are found out before they start. Besides, I'm not sure that it is not best to wait till the night after, or, may be, the night after that. Then the news will have spread, that the goods have been either run and hid away, or seized by the officers. In either case, if you manage well, they will think that it is your venture; and the fellows on the coast will be off their guard — especially Mowle, who's the sharpest of them all."

"Oh, I'll go down to-morrow and talk to Mowle myself," replied Mr. Radford. "It will be well worth my while to give him a hundred guineas to wink a bit."

"Don't try it — don't try it!" exclaimed Harding, quickly. "It will do no good, and a great deal of harm. In the first place, you can do nothing with Mowle. He never took a penny in his life."

"Oh, every man has his price," rejoined Mr. Radford, whose opinion of human nature, as the reader may have perceived, was not particularly high. "It's only because he wants to be bid up to. Mr. Mowle thinks himself above five or ten pounds; but the chink of a hundred guineas is a very pleasant sound."

"He's as honest a fellow as ever lived," answered Harding, "and I tell you plainly, Mr. Radford, that if you offered him ten times the sum, he wouldn't take it. You would only show him

that this venture is not your grand one, without doing yourself the least good. He's a fair, open enemy, and lets every one know that, as long as he's a riding-officer here, he will do all he can against us."

"Then he must be knocked on the head," said Mr. Radford, in a calm and deliberate tone; "and it shall be done, too, if he meddles with my affairs."

"It will not be I who do it," replied Harding; "unless we come hand to hand together. Then, every man must take care of himself; but I should be very sorry, notwithstanding; for he's a straightforward, bold fellow, as brave as a lion, and with a good heart into the bargain. I wonder such an honest man ever went into such a rascally service."

The last observation of our friend Harding may perhaps sound strangely to the reader's ears; but some allowance must be made for professional prejudices, and it is by no means too much to say that the smugglers of those days, and even of a much later period, looked upon their own calling as highly honest, honourable, and respectable, regarding the Customs as a most fraudulent and abominable institution, and all connected with it more or less in the light of a band of swindlers and knaves, leagued together for the purpose of preventing honest men from pursuing their avocations in peace. Such were the feelings which induced Harding to wonder that so good a man as Mowle could have anything to do with the prevention of smuggling; for he was so thoroughly convinced he was in the right himself, that he could not conceive how any one could see the case in any other point of view.

"Ay," answered Mr. Radford, "that is a wonder, if he is such a good sort of man; but that I doubt. However, as you say it would not do to put one's self in his power, I'll have him looked after, and in the meanwhile, let us talk of the rest of the business. You say the night after to-morrow, or the night after that! I must know, however; for the men must be down. How are we to arrange that?"

"Why, I'll see what the weather is like," was Harding's reply. "Then I can easily send up to let you know — or, what will be better still, if you can gather the men together the day after

to-morrow, in the different villages not far off the coast, and I should find it the right sort of night, and get out to sea, they shall see a light on the top of Tolsford Hill, as soon as I am near in shore again. That will serve to guide them and puzzle the officers. Then let them gather, and come down towards Dimchurch, where they will find somebody from me to guide them."

"They shall gather first at Saltwood," said Mr. Radford, "and then march down to Dimchurch. But how are we to manage about the ship?"

"Why, you must send an order," answered Harding, "for both days, and let your skipper know that if he does not see us the first, he will see us the second."

"You had better take it down with you at once," replied Mr. Radford, "and get it off early to-morrow. If you'll just come up to my house, I'll write it for you in a minute."

"Ay, but I'm not going home to-night," said the smuggler; "I can have a bed at Mrs. Clare's; and I'm going to sleep there, so you can send it over when you like in the morning, and I'll get it off in time."

"I wish you would not go hanging about after that girl, when we've got such serious business in hand," exclaimed Mr. Radford, in a sharp tone; but the next moment he added, with a sudden change of voice, "It doesn't signify to-night, however. There will be time enough; and they say you are going to marry her, Harding. Is that true?"

"I should say, that 's my business," replied Harding, bluntly, "but that I look upon it as an honour, Mr. Radford, that she's going to marry me; for a better girl does not live in the land, and I've known her a long while now, so I'm never likely to think otherwise."

"Ay, I've known her a long time, too," answered Mr. Radford — "ever since her poor father was shot, and before; and a very good girl I believe she is. But now that you are over here, you may as well wait and hear what comes of these goods. Couldn't you just ride over to the Ramleys to-morrow morning — there you'll hear all about it."

Harding laughed, but replied the next moment, in a grave

tone, "I don't like the Ramleys, Sir, and don't want to have more to do with them than I can help. I shall hear all about it soon enough, without going there."

"But I sha'n't," answered Mr. Radford.

"Then you had better send your son, Sir," rejoined Harding. "He's oftener there than I am, a great deal. — Well, the matter is all settled, then. Either the night after to-morrow, or the night after that, if the men keep a good look-out, they'll see a light on Tolsford Hill. Then they must gather as fast as possible at Saltwood, and come on with anybody they may find there. Good night, Mr. Radford."

"Good night, Harding — good night," said Mr. Radford, walking on; and the other turning his steps back towards Harbourne, made his way, by the first road on the right, to the cottage where we have seen him in the earlier part of the day.

It was a pleasant aspect that the cottage presented when he went in, which he did without any of the ceremonies of knocking at the door or ringing the bell; for he was sure of a welcome. There was but one candle lighted on the table, for the dwellers in the place were poor; but the room was small, and that one was quite sufficient to show the white walls and the neat shelves covered with crockery, and with one or two small prints in black frames. Besides, there was the fire-place, with a bright and cheerful, but not large fire; for though, in the month of September, English nights are frequently cold and sometimes frosty, the weather had been as yet tolerably mild. Nevertheless, the log of fir at the top blazed high, and crackled amidst the white and red embers below, and the flickering flame, as it rose and fell, caused the shadows to fall more vaguely or distinctly upon the walls, with a fanciful uncertainty of outline, that had something cheerful, yet mysterious in it.

The widow was bending over the fire, with her face turned away, and her figure in the shadow. The daughter was busily working with her needle, but her eyes were soon raised — and they were very beautiful eyes — as Harding entered. A smile, too, was upon her lips; and though even tears may be lovely, and a sad look awaken deep and tender emotions, yet the smile of

affection on a face we love is the brightest aspect of that bright thing the human countenance. It is what the sunshine is to the landscape, which may be fair in the rain or sublime in the storm, but can never harmonize so fully with the innate longing for happiness which is in the breast of every one, as when lighted up with the rays that call all its excellence and all its powers into life and being.

Harding sat down beside the girl, and took her hand in his, saying, "Well, Kate, this day three weeks, then, remember?"

"My mother says so," answered the girl, with a cheek somewhat glowing, "and then, you know, John, you are to give it up altogether. No more danger — no more secrets?"

"Oh, as for danger," answered Harding, laughing, "I did not say that, love. I don't know what life would be worth without danger. Every man is in danger all day long; and I suppose that we are only given life just to feel the pleasure of it by the chance of losing it. But no dangers but the common ones, Kate. I'll give up the trade, as you have made me promise; and I shall have enough by that time to buy out the whole vessel, in which I've got shares, and what between that and the boats, we shall do very well. You put me in mind, with your fears, of a song that wicked boy, little Starlight, used to sing. I learned it from hearing him: a more mischievous little dog does not live; but he has got a sweet pipe."

"Sing it, John — sing it!" cried Kate; "I love to hear you sing, for it seems as if you sing what you are thinking."

"No, I won't sing it," answered Harding, "for it is a sad sort of song, and that won't do when I am so happy."

"Oh, I like sad songs!" said the girl; "they please me far more than all the merry ones."

"Oh; pray sing it, Harding!" urged the widow; "I am very fond of a song that makes me cry."

"This won't do that," replied the smuggler; "but it is sadder than some that do, I always think. However, I'll sing it, if you like;" and in a fine, mellow, bass voice, to a very simple air, with a flattened third coming in every now and then, like the note of a wintry bird, he went on: —

SONG.

"Life's like a boat,
Rowing — rowing
Over a bright sea,
On the waves to float,
Flowing — flowing
Away from her lea.

"Up goes the sheet!
Sailing — sailing,
To catch the rising breeze,
While the winds fleet,
Wailing — wailing,
Sigh o'er the seas.

"She darts through the waves,
Gaily — gaily,
Scattering the foam.
Beneath her, open graves,
Daily — daily,
The blithest to entomb.

"Who heeds the deep,
Yawning — yawning
For its destined prey,
When from night's dark sleep,
Dawning — dawning,
Wakens the bright day?

"Away, o'er the tide!
Fearless — fearless
Of all that lies beneath;
Let the waves still hide,
Cheerless — cheerless,
All their stores of death.

"Stray where we may,
Roaming — roaming
Either far or near,
Death is on the way,
Coming — coming —
Who's the fool to fear?"

The widow did weep, however, not at the rude song, though the voice that sung it was fine, and perfect in the melody, but at the remembrances which it awakened — remembrances on which she loved to dwell, although they were so sad.

"Ay, Harding," she said, "it's very true what your song says. Whatever way one goes, death is near enough; and I don't know that it's a bit nearer on the sea than anywhere else."

"Not a whit," replied Harding; "God's hand is upon the sea as well as upon the land, Mrs. Clare; and if it is his will that we go, why we go; and if it is his will that we stay, he doesn't want strength to protect us."

"No, indeed," answered Mrs. Clare; "and it's that which comforts me, for I think that what is God's will must be good. I'm sure, when my poor husband went out in the morning, six years ago come the tenth of October next, as well and as hearty as a man could be, I never thought to see him brought home a corpse, and I left a lone widow with my poor girl, and not knowing where to look for any help. But God raised me up friends where I least expected them."

"Why you had every right to expect that Sir Robert would be kind to you, Mrs. Clare," rejoined Harding, "when your husband had been in his service for sixteen or seventeen years."

"No, indeed, I hadn't," said the widow; "for Sir Robert was always, we thought, a rough, hard master, grumbling continually, till my poor man could hardly bear it; for he was a free-spoken man, as I dare say you remember, Mr. Harding, and would say his mind to any one, gentle or simple."

"He was as good a soul as ever lived," answered Harding; "a little rash and passionate, but none the worse for that."

"Ay, but it was that which set the head keeper against him," answered the widow, "and he set Sir Robert, making out that Edward was always careless and insolent; but he did his duty as well as any man, and knowing that, he didn't like to be found fault with. However, I don't blame Sir Robert; for since my poor man's death he has found out what he was worth; and very kind he has been to me, to be sure. The cottage, and the garden, and the good bit of ground at the back, and twelve shillings a-week into the bargain, have we had from him ever since."

"Ay, and I am sure nothing can be kinder than the two young ladies," said Kate; "they are always giving me something; and Miss Edith taught me all I know. I should have been sadly

ignorant if it had not been for her — and a deal of trouble I gave her.”

“God bless her!” cried Harding, heartily. “She’s a nice young lady, I believe, though I never saw her but twice, and then she looked very sad.”

“Ay, she has cause enough, poor thing!” said Mrs. Clare. “Though I remember her as blithe as the morning lark — a great deal gayer than Miss Zara, gay as she may be.”

“Ay, I know — they crossed her love,” answered Harding; “and that’s enough to make one sad. Though I never heard the rights of the story.”

“Oh, it was bad enough to break her heart, poor thing!” replied Mrs. Clare. “You remember young Layton, the rector’s son — a fine, handsome, bold lad as ever lived, and as good as he was handsome. Well, he was quite brought up with these young ladies, you know — always up at the Hall, and Miss Edith always down at the Rectory; and one would have thought Sir Robert blind or foolish, not to fancy that two such young things would fall in love with each other; and so they did, to be sure. Many’s the time I’ve seen them down here, in this very cottage, laughing and talking, and as fond as a pair of doves — for Sir Robert used to let them do just whatever they liked, and many a time used to send young Harry Layton to take care of Miss Croyland, when she was going out to walk any distance; so, very naturally, they promised themselves to each other; and one day — when he was twenty and she just sixteen — they got a Prayer-Book at the Rectory, and read over the marriage ceremony together, and took all the vows down upon their bended knees. I remember it quite well, for I was down at the Rectory that very day helping the housekeeper; and just as they had done old Mr. Layton came in, and found them somewhat confused, and the book open between them. He would know what it was all about, and they told him the truth. So then he was in a terrible taking; and he got Miss Croyland under his arm and went away up to Sir Robert directly, and told him the whole story without a minute’s delay. Every one thought it would end in being a match; for though Sir Robert was very angry, and insisted that Harry Layton should be

sent to his regiment immediately — for he was then just home for a bit, on leave — he did not show how angry he was at first, but very soon after he turned Mr. Layton out of the living, and made him pay, I don't know what, for dislapidations; so that he was arrested and put in prison — which broke his heart, poor man, and he died!”

Harding gave Sir Robert Croyland a hearty oath; and Mrs. Clare proceeded to tell her tale, saying — “I did not give much heed to the matter then; for it was just at that time that my husband was killed, and I could think of nothing else; but when I came to hear of what was going on, I found that Sir Robert had promised his daughter to this young Radford —”

“As nasty a vermin as ever lived,” said Harding.

“Well, she won't have him, I'm sure,” continued the widow, “for it has been hanging off and on for these six years. People at first said it was because they were too young. But I know that she has always refused, and declared that nothing should ever drive her to marry him, or any one else; for the law might say what it liked, but her own heart and her own conscience, told her that she was Harry Layton's wife, and could not be any other man's, as long as he was living. Susan, her maid, heard her say so to Sir Robert himself; but he still keeps teasing her about it, and tells everybody she's engaged to young Radford.”

“He'll go to the devil,” said Harding; “and I'll go to bed, Mrs. Clare, for I must be up early to-morrow, to get a good many things to rights. God bless you Kate, my love! I dare say I shall see you before I go — for I must measure the dear little finger!” And giving her a hearty kiss, Harding took a candle, and retired to the snug room that had been prepared for him.

CHAPTER XI.

WE must change the scene for a while, not only to another part of the county of Kent, but to very different people from the worthy Widow Clare and the little party assembled at her cottage. We must pass over the events of the night also, and of the following morning up to the hour of nine, proposing shortly to return to

Harbourne House, and trace the course of those assembled there. The dwelling into which we must now introduce the reader, was a large, old-fashioned Kentish farm-house, not many miles on the Sussex side of Ashford. It was built, as many of these farm-houses still are, in the form of a cross, presenting four limbs of strongly constructed masonry, two stories high, with latticed windows divided into three partitions, separated by rather neatly cut divisions of stone. Externally it had a strong Harry-the-Eighth look about it, and probably had been erected in his day, or in that of one of his immediate successors, as the residence of some of the smaller gentry of the time.

At the period I speak of, it was tenanted by a family notorious for their daring and licentious life, and still renowned in county tradition for many a fierce and lawless act. Nevertheless, the head of the house, now waxing somewhat in years, carried on, not only ostensibly but really, the peaceable occupation of a Kentish farmer. He had his cows and his cattle, and his sheep and his pigs; he grew wheat and barley, and oats and turnips; had a small portion of hop-ground, and brewed his own beer. But this trade of farming was only a small part of his employment, though, to say the truth, he had given himself up more to it since his bodily powers had declined, and he was no longer able to bear the fatigue and exertion which the great strength of his early years had looked upon as sport. The branch of his business which he was most fond of was now principally entrusted to his two sons; and two strong, handsome daughters, which made the number of his family amount to four, occasionally aided their brothers, dressed in men's clothes, and mounted upon powerful horses, which they managed as well as any grooms in the county.

The reader must not think that, in this description, we are exercising indiscreetly our licence for dealing in fiction. We are painting a true picture of the family of which we speak, as they lived and acted some eighty or eighty-five years ago.

The wife of the farmer had been dead ten or twelve years; and her children had done just what they liked ever since; but it must be admitted, that, even if she had lived to superintend their education, we have no reason to conclude their conduct would

have been very different from what it was. We have merely said that they had done as they pleased ever since her death, because during her life she had made them do as she pleased, and beat them, or, as she herself termed it, "basted" them heartily, if they did not. She was quite capable of doing so too, to her own perfect satisfaction, for probably few arms in all Kent were furnished with more sinewy muscles or a stouter fist than hers could boast. It was only upon minor points of difference, however, that she and her children ever quarrelled; for of their general course of conduct she approved most highly; and no one was more ready to receive packets of lace, tea, or other goods under her fostering care, or more apt and skilful in stopping a tub of spirits from "talking," or of puzzling a Custom-House officer when force was not at hand to resist him.

She was naturally of so strong a constitution, and so well built a frame, that it is wonderful she died at all; but having caught cold one night, poor thing! — it is supposed, in setting fire to a neighbouring farm-house, the inmates of which were suspected of having informed against her husband — her very strength and vigour gave a tendency to inflammation, which speedily reduced her very low. A surgeon, who visited the house in fear and trembling, bled her largely, and forbade the use of all that class of liquids which she was accustomed to imbibe in considerable quantities; and for three or four days the fear of death made her follow his injunctions. But at the end of that period, when the crisis of the disease was imminent, finding herself no better, and very weak, she declared that the doctor was a fool, and ought to have his head broken, and directed the maid to bring her the big green bottle out of the corner cupboard. To this she applied more than once, and then beginning to get a little riotous, she sent for her family to witness how soon she had cured herself. Sitting up in her bed, with a yellow dressing-gown over her shoulders, and a gay cap overshadowing her burning face, she sung them a song in praise of good liquor — somewhat panting for breath, it must be owned — and then declaring that she was "devilish thirsty," which was probably accurate to the letter, she poured out a large glass from the big green bottle, which hap-

pened to be her bed-fellow for the time, and raised it to her lips. Half the contents went down her throat; but, how it happened I do not know, the rest was spilt upon the bed clothes, and good Mrs. Ramley fell back in a doze, from which nobody could rouse her. Before two hours were over she slept a still sounder sleep, which required the undertaker to provide against its permanence.

The bereaved widower comforted himself after a time. We will not say how many hours it required to effect that process. He was not a drunken man himself; for the passive participle of the verb to "drink" was not often actually applicable to his condition. Nevertheless, there was a great consumption of hollands in the house during the next week; and, if it was a wet funeral that followed, it was not with water, salt or fresh.

There are compensations for all things; and if Ramley had lost his wife, and his children a mother, they all lost also a great number of very good beatings, for, sad to say, he who could thrash all the country round, submitted very often to be thrashed by his better half, or at all events underwent the process of either having his head made closely acquainted with a candlestick, or rendered the means of breaking a platter. After that period the two boys grew up into as fine, tall, handsome, dissolute blackguards as one could wish to look upon; and for the two girls, no term perhaps can be found in the classical authors of our language; but the vernacular supplies an epithet particularly applicable, which we must venture to use. They were two *strapping wenches*, nearly as tall as their brothers, full, rounded, and well formed in person, fine and straight cut in features, with large black shining eyes, a well-turned foot and ankle, and, as was generally supposed, the invincible arm of their mother.

We are not here going to investigate or dwell upon the individual morality of the two young ladies. It is generally said to have been better in some respects than either their ordinary habits, their education, or their language would have led one to expect; and, perhaps being very full of the stronger passions, the softer ones had no great dominion over them.

There, however, they sat at breakfast on the morning of which we have spoken, in the kitchen of the farm-house, with

their father seated at the head of the table. He was still a great, tall, raw-boned man, with a somewhat ogre-ish expression of countenance, and hair more white than grey. But there were four other men at the table besides himself, two being servants of the farm, and two acknowledged lovers of the young ladies — very bold fellows as may well be supposed; for to marry a she-lion or a demoiselle bear would have been a light undertaking compared to wedding one of the Miss Ramleys. They seemed to be upon very intimate terms with those fair personages, however, and perhaps possessed as much of their affection as could possibly be obtained; but still the love-making seemed rather of a feline character, for the caresses, which were pretty prodigal, were mingled with — we must not say interrupted by — a great deal of grumbling and growling, some scratching, and more than one pat upon the side of the head, which did not come with the gentleness of the western wind. The fare upon the table consisted neither of tea, coffee, cocoa, nor any other kind of weak beverage, but of beef and strong beer, a diet very harmonious with the appearance of the persons who partook thereof. It was seasoned occasionally with roars of laughter, gay and not very delicate jests, various pieces of fun, which on more than one occasion went to the very verge of an angry encounter, together with a good many blasphemous oaths, and those testimonies of affection which I have before spoken of as liberally bestowed by the young ladies upon their lovers in the shape of cuffs and scratches. The principal topic of conversation seemed to be some adventure which was even then going forward, and in which the sons of the house were taking a part. No fear, no anxiety, however, was expressed by any one, though they wondered that Jim and Ned had not yet returned.

“If they don’t come soon they won’t get much beef, Tom, if you swallow it at that rate,” said the youngest Miss Ramley to her sweetheart; “you’ve eaten two pounds already, I’m sure.”

The young gentleman declared that it was all for love of her, but that he hadn’t eaten half so much as she had, whereupon the damsel became wroth, and appealed to her father, who, for his part, vowed, that, between them both, they had eaten and

swilled enough to fill the big hog-trough. The dispute might have run high, for Miss Ramley was not inclined to submit to such observations, even from her father; but, just as she was beginning in good set terms, which she had learnt from himself, to condemn her parent's eyes, the old man started up, exclaiming, "Hark! there's a shot out there!"

"To be sure," answered one of the lovers. "It's the first of September, and all the people are out shooting."

Even while he was speaking, however, several more shots were heard, apparently too many to proceed from sportsmen in search of game, and the next moment the sound of horses' feet could be heard running quick upon the road, and then turning into the yard which lay before the house.

"There they are! — there they are!" cried half-a-dozen voices; and, all rushing out at the front door, they found the two young men with several companions, and four led horses, heavily laden. Jim, the elder brother, with the assistance of one of those who accompanied him, was busily engaged in shutting the two great wooden gates which had been raised by old Ramley some time before — nobody could tell why — in place of a five-barred gate, which, with the tall stone wall, formerly shut out the yard from the road. The other brother, Edward, or Ned Ramley, as he was called, stood by the side of his horse, holding his head down over a puddle; and, for a moment, no one could make out what he was about. On his sister Jane approaching him, however, she perceived a drop of blood falling every second into the dirty water below, and exclaimed, "How hast thou broken thy noddle, Ned?"

"There, let me alone, Jinny," cried the young man, shaking off the hand she had laid upon his arm, "or I shall bloody my toggery. One of those fellows has nearly cracked my skull, that's all; and he'd have done it, too, if he had but been a bit nearer. This brute shied just as I was firing my pistol at him, or he'd never have got within arm's length. It's nothing — it's but a scratch. — Get the goods away; for they'll be after us quick enough. They are chasing the major and his people, and that's the way we got off."

One of the usual stories of the day was then told by the rest — of how a cargo had been run the night before, and got safe up into the country: how, when they thought all danger over, they had passed before old Bob Croyland's windows, and how Jim had given him a shot as he stood at one of them; and then they went on to say that, whether it was the noise of the gun, or that the old man had sent out to call the officers upon them, they could not tell; but about three miles further on, they saw a largish party of horse upon their right. Flight had then become the order of the day; but, finding that they could not effect it in one body, they were just upon the point of separating, Ned Ramley declared, when two of the riding officers overtook them, supported by a number of dragoons. Some firing took place, without much damage, and, dividing into three bodies, the smugglers scampered off, the Ramleys and their friends taking their way towards their own house, and the others in different directions. The former might have escaped unpursued, it would seem, had not the younger brother, Ned, determined to give one of the dragoons a shot before he went: thus bringing on the encounter in which he had received the wound on his head.

While all this was being told to the father, the two girls, their lovers, the farm-servants, and several of the men, hurried the smuggled goods into the house, and raising a trap in the floor of the kitchen — contrived in such a manner that four whole boards moved up at once on the western side of the room — stowed the different articles away in places of concealment below, so well arranged, that even if the trap was discovered, the officers would find nothing but a vacant space, unless they examined the walls very closely.

The horses were then all led to the stable; and Edward Ramley, having in some degree stopped the bleeding of his wound, moved into the house, with most of the other men. Old Ramley and the two farm-servants, however, remained without, occupying themselves in loading a cart with manure, till the sound of horses galloping down was heard, and somebody shook the gates violently, calling loudly to those within to open, "in the King's name."

The farmer instantly mounted upon the cart, and looked over the wall; but the party before the gates consisted only of five or six dragoons, of whom he demanded, in a bold tone, "Who the devil be you, that I should open for you? Go away, go away, and leave a quiet man at peace!"

"If you don't open the gates, we 'll break them down," said one of the men.

"Do, if you dare," answered old Ramley, boldly; "and if you do, I 'll shoot the best of you dead. — Bring me my gun, Tom. — Where 's your warrant, young man? You are not an officer, and you 've got none with you, so I shan't let any boiled lobsters enter my yard, I can tell you."

By this time he was provided with the weapon he had sent for; and one of his men, similarly armed, had got into the cart beside him. The appearance of resistance was rather ominous, and the dragoons were well aware that if they did succeed in forcing an entrance, and blood were spilt, the whole responsibility would rest upon themselves, if no smuggled goods should be found, as they had neither warrant nor any officer of the Customs with them.

After a short consultation, then, he who had spoken before, called to old Ramley, saying, "We 'll soon bring a warrant. Then look to yourself;" and, thus speaking, he rode off with his party. Old Ramley only laughed, however, and turned back into the house, where he made the party merry at the expense of the dragoons. All the men who had been out upon the expedition were now seated at the table, dividing the beef and bread amongst them, and taking hearty draughts from the tankard. Not the least zealous in this occupation was Edward Ramley, who seemed to consider the deep gash upon his brow as a mere scratch, not worth talking about. He laughed and jested with the rest; and when they had demolished all that the board displayed, he turned to his father, saying, not in the most reverent tone, "Come, old fellow, after bringing our venture home safe, I think you ought to send round the true stuff: we 've had beer enough. Let 's have some of the Dutchman."

"That you shall, Neddy, my boy," answered the farmer,

“only I wish you had shot that rascal you fired at. However, one can’t always have a steady aim, especially with a fidgetty brute like that you ride;” and away he went to bring the hollands, which soon circulated very freely amongst the party, producing, in its course, various degrees of mirth and joviality, which speedily deviated into song. Some of the ditties that were sung were good, and some of them very bad; but almost all were coarse, and the one that was least so was the following:—

SONG.

“It’s wonderful, it’s wonderful, is famous London town,

With its alleys

And its valleys,

And its houses up and down;

But I would give fair London town, its court, and all its people,

For the little town of Biddenden; with the moon above the steeple.

“It’s wonderful, it’s wonderful, to see what pretty faces

In London streets

A person meets

In very funny places;

But I wouldn’t give for all the eyes in London town one sees,

A pair, that by the moonlight, looks out beneath the trees.

“It’s wonderful, in London town, how soon a man may hold,

By art and sleight,

Or main and might,

A pretty sum of gold;

Yet give me but a pistol, and one rich squire or two,

A moonlight night, a yellow chaise, and the high road will do.”

This was not the last song that was sung; but that which followed was interrupted by one of the pseudo-labourers coming in from the yard, to say that there was a hard knocking at the gate.

“I think it is Mr. Radford’s voice,” added the man, “but I’m not sure; and I did not like to get up into the cart to look.”

“Run up stairs to the window, Jinny!” cried old Ramley, “and you’ll soon see.”

His daughter did, on this occasion, as she was bid, and soon called down from above, “It’s old Radford, sure enough; but he’s got two men with him!”

"It 's all right, if he 's there," said Jim Ramley; and the gates were opened in a minute, to give that excellent gentleman admission.

Now, Mr. Radford, it must be remembered, was a magistrate for the county of Kent; but his presence created neither alarm nor confusion in the house of the Ramleys; and when he entered, leaving his men in the court for a minute, he said, with a laugh, holding the father of that hopeful family by the arm, "I 've come to search, and to stop the others. Where are the goods?"

"Safe enough," answered the farmer. "No fear — no fear!"

"But can we look under the trap?" asked Mr. Radford, who seemed as well acquainted with the secrets of the place as the owner thereof.

"Ay, ay!" replied the old man. "Don't leave 'em too long — that 's all."

"I 'll go down myself," said Radford; "they 've got scent of it, or I wouldn't find it out."

"All right — all right!" rejoined the other, in a low voice; and the magistrate, raising his tone, exclaimed, "Here, Clinch and Adams — you two fools! why don't you come in? They say there is nothing here; but we must search. We must not take any man's word; not to say that I doubt yours, Mr. Ramley; but it is necessary, you know."

"Oh, do what you like, Sir," replied the farmer. "I don't care!"

A very respectable search was then commenced, and pursued from room to room — one of the men who accompanied Mr. Radford, and who was an officer of the Customs, giving old Ramley a significant wink with his right eye as he passed, at which the other grinned. Indeed, had the whole matter not been very well understood between the great majority of both parties, it would have been no very pleasant or secure task for any three men in England to enter the kitchen of that farm-house on such an errand. At length, however, Mr. Radford and his companions returned to the kitchen, and the magistrate thought fit to walk somewhat out of his way towards the left-hand side of the room, when suddenly

stopping, he exclaimed, in a grave tone, "Hallo! Ramley, what's here? These boards seem loose!"

"To be sure they are," answered the farmer; "that's the way to the old beer cellar. But there's nothing in it, upon my honour!"

"But we must look, Ramley, you know," said Mr. Radford. "Come, open it, whatever it is!"

"Oh, with all my heart," replied the man; "but you'll perhaps break your head. That's your fault, not mine, however," — and, advancing to the side of the room, he took a crooked bit of iron from his pocket — not unlike that used for pulling stones out of a horse's hoofs — and insinuating it between the skirting-board and the floor, soon raised the trap-door of which we have spoken before.

A vault of about nine feet deep was now exposed, with the top of a ladder leading into it; and Mr. Radford ordered the men who were with him to go down first. The one who had given old Ramley the wink in passing, descended without ceremony; but the other, who was also an officer, hesitated for a moment.

"Go down — go down, Clinch!" said Mr. Radford. "You *would* have a search, and so you shall do it thoroughly."

The man obeyed, and the magistrate paused a moment to speak with the smuggling farmer, saying, in a low voice, "I don't mind their knowing I'm your friend, Ramley. Let them think about that as they like. Indeed, I'd rather that they did see we understand each other; so give me a hint if they go too far; I'll bear it out."

Thus saying, he descended into the cellar, and old Ramley stood gazing down upon the three from above, with his gaunt figure bending over the trap-door. At the end of a minute or two he called down, "There — that ought to do, I'm sure! We can't be kept bothering here all day!"

Something was said in a low tone by one of the men below; but then the voice of Mr. Radford was heard, exclaiming, "No, no; that will do! We've had enough of it! Go up, I say! There's no use of irritating people by unreasonable suspicions, Mr. Clinch. Is it not quite enough, Adams? Are you satisfied?"

"Oh! quite, Sir," answered the other officer; "there's nothing but bare walls and an empty beer barrel."

The next moment the party began to re-appear from the trap, the officer Clinch coming up first, with a grave look, and Mr. Radford and the other following, with a smile upon their faces.

"There, all is clear enough," said Mr. Radford; "so you, gentlemen, can go and pursue your search elsewhere. I must remain here to wait for my son, whom I sent for to join me with the servants, as you know; not that I feared any resistance from you, Mr. Ramley; but smuggling is so sadly prevalent now-a-days, that one must be on one's guard, you know."

A horse laugh burst from the whole party round the table; and in the midst of it the two officers retired into the yard, where, mounting their horses, they opened the gates and rode away.

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Radford shook old Ramley familiarly by the hand, exclaiming, "This is the luckiest thing in the world, my good fellow! If I can but get them to accuse me of conniving at this job, it will be a piece of good fortune which does not often happen to a man."

Ramley, as well he might, looked a little confounded; but Mr. Radford drew him aside, and spoke to him for a quarter of an hour, in a voice raised hardly above a whisper. Numerous laughs, and nods, and signs of mutual understanding passed between them; and the conversation ended by Mr. Radford saying, aloud, "I wonder what can keep Dick so long; he ought to have been here before now! I sent over to him at eight; and it is past eleven."

CHAPTER XII.

WE will now, by the reader's good leave, return for a short time to Harbourne House, where the party sat down to breakfast, at the inconveniently early hour of eight. I will not take upon myself to say that it might not be a quarter-of-an-hour later, for almost everything is after its time on this globe, and Harbourne House did not differ in this respect from all the rest of the world. From the face of young Radford towards the countenance of Sir

Edward Digby shot some very furious glances as they took their places at the breakfast-table; but those looks gradually sunk down into a dull and sullen frown, as they met with no return. Sir Edward Digby, indeed, seemed to have forgotten the words which had passed between them as soon as they had been uttered; and he laughed, and talked, and conversed with every one as gaily as if nothing had happened. Edith was some ten minutes behind the rest at the meal, and seemed even more depressed than the night before; but Zara had reserved a place for her at her own side; and taking the first opportunity, while the rest of the party were busily talking together, she whispered a few words in her ear. Sir Edward Digby saw her face brighten in a moment, and her eyes turn quickly towards himself; but he took no notice; and an interval of silence occurring the next moment, the conversation between the two sisters was interrupted.

During breakfast, a servant brought in a note and laid it on the side-board, and after the meal was over, Miss Croyland retired to her own room to make ready for her departure. Zara was about to follow; but good Mrs. Barbara, who had heard some sharp words pass between the two gentlemen, and had remarked the angry looks of young Radford, was determined that they should not quarrel without the presence of ladies, and consequently called her youngest niece back, saying, in a whisper, "Stay here, my dear. I have a particular reason why I want you not to go."

"I will be back in a moment, my dear aunt," replied Zara; but the worthy old lady would not suffer her to depart; and the butler entering at that moment, called the attention of Richard Radford to the note which had been brought in some half-an-hour before, and which was, in fact, a sudden summons from his father.

The contents seemed to give him no great satisfaction; and, turning to the servant, he said, "Well, tell them to saddle my horse, and bring him round;" and as he spoke, he directed a frowning look towards the young baronet, as if he could scarcely refrain from showing his anger till a fitting opportunity occurred for expressing it.

Digby, however, continued talking lightly with Zara Croyland,

in the window, till the horse had been brought round, and the young man had taken leave of the rest of the party. Then sauntering slowly out of the room, he passed through the hall door, to the side of Richard Radford's horse, just as the latter was mounting."

"Mr. Radford," he said, in a low tone, "you were pleased to make an impertinent observation upon my conduct, which led me to tell you what I think of yours. We were interrupted; but I dare say you must wish for further conversation with me. You can have it when and where you please."

"At three o'clock this afternoon, in the road straight from the back of the house," replied young Radford, in a low, determined tone, touching the hilt of his sword.

Sir Edward Digby nodded, and then turning on his heel, walked coolly into the house.

"I am sure, Sir Edward," cried Mrs. Barbara, as soon as she saw him, while Zara fixed her eyes somewhat anxiously upon his countenance — "I am sure you and Mr. Radford have been quarrelling."

"Oh no, my dear Madam," replied Sir Edward Digby; "nothing of the kind, I can assure you. Our words were very ordinary words, and perfectly civil, upon my word, We had no time to quarrel."

"My dear Sir Edward," said Sir Robert Croyland, "you must excuse me for saying it, I must have no such things here. I am a magistrate for this county, and bound by my oath to keep the peace. My sister tells me that high words passed between you and my young friend Radford before breakfast?"

"They were very few, Sir Robert," answered Digby, in a careless tone; "he thought fit to make an observation upon my saying a few words to your daughter, here, in a low tone, which I conceive every gentleman has a right to do to a fair lady. I told him, I thought his conduct insolent; and that was all that passed. I believe the youth has got a bad headache from too much of your good wine, Sir Robert; therefore, I forgive him. I dare say, he'll be sorry enough for what he said, before the day is over; and if he is not, I cannot help it."

“Well, well, if that ’s all, it is no great matter!” replied the master of the house; “but here comes round the carriage; run and call Edith, Zara.”

Before the young lady could quit the room, however, her sister appeared; and the only moment they obtained for private conference was at the door of the carriage, after Edith had got in, and while her father was giving some directions to the coachman. No great information could be given or received, indeed, for Sir Robert returned to the side of the vehicle immediately, bade his daughter good-bye, and the carriage rolled away.

As soon as it was gone, Sir Edward Digby proposed, with the permission of Sir Robert Croyland, to go out to shoot; for he did not wish to subject himself to any further cross-examination by the ladies of the family, and he read many inquiries in fair Zara’s eyes, which he feared might be difficult to answer. Retiring, then, to put on a more fitting costume, while gamekeepers and dogs were summoned to attend him, he took the opportunity of writing a short letter, which he delivered to his servant to post, giving him, at the same time, brief directions to meet him near the cottage of good Mrs. Clare, about half-past two, with the sword which the young officer usually wore when not on military service. Those orders were spoken in so ordinary and commonplace a tone that none but a very shrewd fellow would have discovered that anything was going forward different from the usual occurrences of the day; but Somers *was* a very shrewd fellow; and in a few minutes — judging from what he had observed while waiting on his master during dinner on the preceding day — he settled the whole matter entirely to his own satisfaction, thinking, according to the phraseology of those times, “Sir Edward will pink him — and a good thing too; but it will spoil sport here, I’ve a notion.”

As he descended to the hall, in order to join the keepers and their four-footed coadjutors, the young baronet encountered Mrs. Barbara and her niece; and he perceived Zara’s eyes instantly glance to his sword-belt, from which he had taken care to remove a weapon that could only be inconvenient to him in the sport he was about to pursue. She was not so easily to be deceived as her father; but yet the absence of the weapon usually employed in

those days, as the most efficacious for killing a fellow-creature, put her mind at ease, at least for the present; and, although she determined to watch the proceedings of the young baronet during the two or three following days — as far, at least, as propriety would permit — she took no further notice at the moment, being very anxious to prevent her good aunt from interfering more than necessary in the affairs of Sir Edward Digby.

Mrs. Barbara, indeed, was by no means well pleased that Sir Edward was going to deprive her schemes of the full benefit which might have accrued from his passing the whole of that day unoccupied, with Zara, at Harbourne House, and hinted significantly that she trusted if he did not find good sport he would return early, as her niece was very fond of a ride over the hills, only that she had no companion.

The poor girl coloured warmly, and the more so as Sir Edward could not refrain from a smile.

“I trust, then, I shall have the pleasure of being your companion to-morrow, Miss Croyland,” he said, turning to the young lady. “Why should we not ride over, and see your excellent uncle and your sister? I must certainly pay my respects to him; and if I may have the honour of escorting you, it will give double pleasure to my ride.”

Zara Croyland was well aware that many a matter, which if treated seriously may become annoying — if not dangerous, can be carried lightly off by a gay and dashing jest: “Oh, with all my heart,” she said; “only remember, Sir Edward, we must have plenty of servants with us, or else all the people in the country will say that you and I are going to be married; and as I never intend that such a saying should be verified, it will be as well to nip the pretty little blossom of gossip in the bud.”

“It shall be all exactly as you please,” replied the young officer, with a low bow and a meaning smile; but at the very same moment, Mrs. Barbara thought fit to reprove her niece, wondering how she could talk so sillily; and Sir Edward took his leave, receiving his host’s excuses, as he passed through the hall, for not accompanying him on his shooting expedition.

"The truth is, my dear Sir," said Sir Robert Croyland, "that I am now too old and too heavy for such sports."

"You were kind enough to tell me, this is Liberty Hall," replied the young baronet, "and you shall see, my dear Sir, that I take you at your word, both in regard to your game and your wine, being resolved, with your good permission, and for my own health, to kill your birds and spare your bottles."

"Certainly, certainly," answered the master of the mansion — "you shall do exactly as you like;" and with this licence, Sir Edward set out shooting, with tolerable success, till towards two o'clock, when, quite contrary to the advice and opinion of the gamekeepers — who declared that the dogs would have the wind with them in that direction, and that as the day was now hot, the birds would not lie a minute — he directed his course towards the back of Harbourne Wood, finding, it must be confessed, but very little sport. There, apparently fatigued and disgusted with walking for a mile or two without a shot, he gave his gun to one of the men, and bade him take it back to the house, saying, he would follow speedily. As soon as he had seen them depart, he tracked round the edge of the wood, towards Mrs. Clare's cottage, exactly opposite to which he found his trusty servant, provided as he had directed.

Sir Edward then took the sword and fixed it in his belt, saying, "Now, Somers, you may go!"

"Certainly, Sir," replied the man, touching his hat with a look of hesitation; but he added, a minute after, "you had better let me know where it's to be, Sir, in case —"

"Well," rejoined Sir Edward Digby, with a smile, "you are an old soldier and no meddler, Somers; so that I will tell you, 'in case,' — that the place is in a straight line between this and Harbourne House. So now, face about to the right, and go back by the other road."

The man touched his hat again, and walked quickly away, while the young officer turned his steps up the road which he had followed during the preceding evening in pursuit of the two Miss Croylands. It was a good broad open way, in which there was plenty of fencing room, and he thought to himself as he walked

on, "I shall not be sorry to punish this young vagabond a little. I must see what sort of skill he has, and if possible wound him without hurting him much. If one could keep him to his bed for a fortnight, we should have the field more clear for our own campaign; but these things must always be a chance."

Thus meditating, and looking at his watch to see how much time he had to spare, Major Sir Edward Digby walked on till he came within sight of the garden wall and some of the out-buildings of Harbourne House. The reader, if he has paid attention, will remember that the road did not go straight to the back of the house itself: a smaller path, which led to the right, conducting thither; but as the gardens extended for nearly a quarter of a mile on that side, it followed the course of the wall to the left to join the parish road which ran in front of the mansion, leaving the green court, as it was called, or lawn, and the terrace, on the right hand.

As there was no other road in that direction, Sir Edward Digby felt sure that he must be on the ground appointed, but yet, as is the case in all moments of expectation, the time seemed so long, that when he saw the brick-work he took out his watch again, and found there were still five minutes to spare. He accordingly turned upon his steps, walking slowly back for about a quarter of a mile, and then returned, looking sharply out for his opponent, but seeing no one. He was now sure that the time must be past; but, resolved to afford Radford every opportunity, he said to himself, "Watches may differ, and something may have detained him. I will give him a full half hour, and then if he does not come I shall understand the matter."

As soon, then, as he saw the walls once more, he wheeled round and re-trod his steps, then looked at his watch, and found that it was a quarter past three. "Too bad!" he said, — "too bad! The fellow cannot be coward, too, as well as blackguard. One turn more, and then I've done with him." But as he advanced on his way towards the house, he suddenly perceived the flutter of female garments before him, and saying to himself, "This is awkward!" he gazed round for some path, in order to get out of the way for a moment, but could perceive none. The next instant, coming round a shrub which started forward a little

before the rest of the trees, he saw the younger Miss Croyland advancing with a quick step, and, he could not help thinking, with a somewhat agitated air. Her colour was heightened, her eyes eagerly looking on; but, as soon as she saw him, she slackened her pace, and came forward in a more deliberate manner.

“Oh, Sir Edward!” she said, in a calm, sweet tone, “I am glad to see you. You have finished your shooting early, it seems.”

“Why, the sport was beginning to slacken,” answered Sir Edward Digby. “I had not had a shot for the last half hour, and so thought it best to give it up.”

“Well then, you shall take a walk with me,” cried Zara, gaily. “I am just going down to a poor friend of ours, called Widow Clare, and you shall come too.”

“What! notwithstanding all your sage and prudent apprehensions in regard to what people might say if we were seen alone together!” exclaimed Sir Edward Digby, with a smile.

“Oh! I don’t mind that,” answered Zara. “Great occasions, you know, Sir Edward, require decisive measures; and I assuredly want an escort through this terrible forest, to protect me from all the giants and enchanters it may contain.”

Sir Edward Digby looked at his watch again, and saw that it wanted but two minutes to the half hour.

“Oh!” said Zara, affecting a look of pique, “if you have some important appointment, Sir Edward, it is another affair — only tell me if it be so?”

Sir Edward Digby took her hand in his: “I will tell you, dear lady,” he replied, “if you will first tell me one thing, truly and sincerely — What brought you here?”

Zara trembled and coloured; for with the question put in so direct a shape, the agitation, which she had previously overcome, mastered her in turn, and she answered, “Don’t, don’t, or I shall cry.”

“Well, then, tell me at least if I had anything to do with it?” asked the young baronet.

“Yes, you had!” replied Zara; “I can’t tell a falsehood.

But now, Sir Edward, don't, as most of you men would do, suppose that it's from any very tender interest in you, that I did this foolish thing. It was because I thought — I thought, if you were going to do what I imagined, it would be the very worst thing in the world for poor Edith."

"I shall only suppose that you are all that is kind and good," answered Digby — perhaps a little piqued at the indifference which she so studiously assumed; "and even if I thought, Miss Croyland, that you did take some interest in my poor self, depend upon it, I should not be inclined to go one step farther in the way of vanity than you yourself could wish. I am not altogether a coxcomb. But now tell me, how you were led to suspect anything?"

"Promise me first," said Zara, "that this affair shall not take place. Indeed, indeed, Sir Edward, it must not, on every account!"

"There is not the slightest chance of any such thing," replied Sir Edward Digby. "You need not be under the slightest alarm."

"What! you do not mean to say," she exclaimed, with her cheeks glowing and her eyes raised to his face, "that you did not come here to fight him?"

"Not exactly," answered Sir Edward Digby, laughing; "but what I do mean to say, my dear young lady, is, that our friend is half an hour behind his time, and I am not disposed to give him another opportunity of keeping me waiting."

"And if he had been in time," cried Zara, clasping her hands together and casting down her eyes, "I should have been too late."

"But tell me," persisted Sir Edward Digby, "how you heard all this. Has my servant, Somers, been indiscreet?"

"No, no," replied Zara; "no, I can assure you! I saw you go out in your shooting dress, and without a sword. Then I thought it was all over, especially as you had the gamekeepers with you; but some time ago I found that your servant had gone out, carrying a sword under his arm, and had come straight up this road. That made me uneasy. When the gamekeepers came back without you, I was more uneasy still; but I could not get

away from my aunt for a few minutes. When I could, however, I got my hat and cloak, and hurried away, knowing that you would not venture to fight in the presence of a woman. As I went out, all my worst fears were confirmed by seeing your servant come back without the sword; and then — not very well knowing, indeed, what I was to say or do — I hurried on as fast as possible. Now you have the whole story, and you must come away from this place.”

“Very willingly,” answered the young officer; adding, with a smile, “which way shall we go, Miss Croyland? To Widow Clare’s?”

“No, no!” answered Zara, blushing again. “Do not tease me. You do not know how soon, when a woman is agitated, she is made to weep. My father is out, indeed,” she added, in a gayer tone, “so that I should have time to bathe my eyes before dinner, which will be half an hour later than usual; but I should not like my aunt to tell him that I have been taking a crying walk with Sir Edward Digby.”

“Heaven forbid that I should ever give you cause for a tear!” answered the young baronet; and then, with a vague impression that he was doing something very like making love, he added, “but let us return to the house, or perhaps we may have your aunt seeking us.”

“The most likely thing in the world,” replied Zara; and taking their way back, they passed through the gardens and entered the house by one of the side doors.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a custom of those days, I believe, not altogether done away with in the present times, for magistrates to assemble in petty sessions, or to meet at other times for the dispatch of any extraordinary business, in tavern, public-house, or inn — a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance, except where no other place of assembly can be found. It thus happened that, on the day of which we have been speaking, some half-dozen gentlemen, all justices of the peace for the county of Kent,

were gathered together in a good-sized room of the inn, at the little town of *****. There was a table drawn across the room, at which was placed the magistrates' clerk, with sundry sheets of paper before him, several printed forms, and two books, one big and the other little. The magistrates themselves, however, were not seated in due state and dignity, but, on the contrary, were in general standing about and talking together, some looking out of the window into the street, some leaning with their backs against the table and the tails of their coats turned over their hands, while one occupied an arm-chair placed sideways at the board, with one knee thrown over the other — a favourite position which he could not have assumed had he sat with his face to the table.

The latter was Sir Robert Croyland, who had been sent for in haste by his brother justices, to take part in their proceedings relative to a daring act of smuggling which had just been perpetrated. Sir Robert would willingly have avoided giving his assistance upon this occasion; but the summons had been so urgent that he could not refuse going; and he was now not a little angry to find that there were more than sufficient justices present to make a quorum, and to transact all the necessary business. Some one, however, it would seem, had — as usual in all county arrangements — been very busy in pressing for as full an attendance as possible; and those who knew the characters of the gentlemen assembled might have perceived that the great majority of them were not very well qualified to sit as judges upon a case of this nature, as almost every one was under suspicion of leaning towards the side of the smugglers, most of them having at some time engaged more or less in the traffic which they were called upon to stop.

Sir Robert Croyland was the least objectionable in this point of view; for he had always borne a very high name for impartiality in such matters, and had never had anything personally to do with the illicit traffic itself. It is probable, therefore, that he was sent for to give a mere show of justice to the proceedings; for Mr. Radford was expected to be there; and it was a common observation of the county gentlemen, that the latter could now lead Sir Robert

as he liked. Mr. Radford, indeed, had not yet arrived, though two messengers had been despatched to summon him; the answer still being that he had gone over towards Ashford. Sir Robert, therefore, sat in the midst — not harmonizing much in feeling with the rest, and looking anxiously for his friend's appearance, in order to obtain some hint as to how he was to act.

At length, a considerable noise was heard in the streets below, and a sort of constable door-keeper presented himself, to inform the magistrates that the officers and dragoons had arrived, bringing in several prisoners. An immediate bustle took place, the worshipful gentlemen beginning to seat themselves, and one of them — as it is technically termed — moving Sir Robert into the chair. In order to show that this was really as well as metaphysically done, Sir Robert Croyland rose, sat down again, and wheeled himself round to the table. A signal was then given to the constable; and a rush of several persons from without was made into the temporary justice room, which was at once nearly filled with custom-house officers, soldiers, smugglers, and the curious of the village.

Amongst the latter portion of the auditory, — at least, so he supposed at first, — Sir Robert Croyland perceived his young friend, Richard Radford; and he was in the act of beckoning him to come up to the table, in order to inquire where his father was, and how soon he would return, when one of the officers of the Customs suddenly thrust the young gentleman out of the way, exclaiming, "Stand farther back! What are you pushing forward for? Your turn will come soon enough, I warrant."

Sir Robert Croyland was confounded; and for a moment or two he sat silent in perplexity and surprise. Not that he ever entertained a doubt of old Mr. Radford still nourishing all the propensities of his youth; nor that he was not well aware they had formed part of the inheritance of the son; but there were certain considerations of some weight which made Sir Robert feel that it would have been better for him to be in any other spot of the habitable globe than that where he was at the moment. Recovering himself, however, after a brief pause of anxious indecision, he made a sign to the constable door-keeper, and whispered to him, as soon as

the man reached his side, to inquire into the cause of Mr. Richard Radford's being there. The man was shrewd and quick, and while half the magistrates were speaking across the table to half the officers and some of the dragoons, he went and returned to and from the other side of the room, and then whispered to the baronet, "For smuggling, Sir — caught abetting the others — his name marked upon some of the goods!"

Sir Robert Croyland was not naturally a brilliant man. Though hasty in temper in his early days, he had always been somewhat obtuse in intellect; but this was a case of emergency; and there is no greater sharpener of the wits than necessity. In an instant, he had formed his plan to gain time, which was his great object at that moment; and, taking out his watch, he laid it on the table, exclaiming aloud, "Gentlemen! gentlemen! a little regularity, if you please. My time is precious. I have an important engagement this afternoon, and I —"

But his whole scheme had nearly been frustrated by the impetuosity of young Radford himself, who at once pushed through officers and soldiers, saying, "And so have I, Sir Robert, a very important engagement this afternoon. I claim to be heard as speedily as possible."

Sir Robert, however, was determined to carry his point, and to avoid having aught to do with the case of his young friend, even at the risk of giving him offence and annoyance. "Stand back, Sir!" he said. "In this court, there is no friendship or favour. You will have attention in turn, but not before. Mr. Mowle, bring forward the prisoners one after the other, as near as possible, in the order of — the order of — of their capture," he added, at length, after hesitating for a moment to consider whether it was or was not probable that young Radford had been amongst those last taken; "and let all the others be removed, under guard, into the next room."

"Won't that make it a long affair, Sir Robert?" asked Mr. Runnington, a neighbouring squire.

"Oh dear, no!" replied the chairman; "by regularity we shall save time. Do as you are directed, Mowle!"

Young Radford showed a strong disposition to resist, or, at

least, to protest against this arrangement; but the officer to whom the baronet had spoken, treated the prisoner with very little reverence; and he, with the rest of the gang, was removed from the room, with the exception of three, one of whom, with a smart cockade in his hat, such as was worn at that time by military men in undress, swaggered up to the table with a bold air, as if he were about to address the magistrates.

"Ah, major, is that you?" asked a gentleman on Sir Robert's right, known in the country by the name of Squire Jollyboat, though his family being originally French, his real appellation was Jollivet.

"Oh yes, squire," answered the prisoner, in a gay, indifferent tone, "here I am. It is long since I have had the pleasure of seeing your worship. I think you were not on the bench the last time I was committed, or I should have fared better."

"I don't know that, major," replied the gentleman; "on the former occasion I gave you a month, I think."

"Ay, but the blackguards that time gave me two," rejoined the major.

"Because it was the second offence," said Squire Jollyboat.

"The second! Lord bless you, Sir!" answered the major, with a look of cool contempt; and turning round with a wink to his two companions, they all three laughed joyously, as if it were the finest joke in the world.

It might not be very interesting to the reader were we to give in detail the depositions of the various witnesses upon a common case of smuggling in the last century, or to repeat all the various arguments which were bandied backwards and forwards between the magistrates, upon the true interpretation of the law, as expressed in the 9th George II., cap. 35. It was very evident, indeed, to the officers of Customs, to the serjeant of dragoons, and even to the prisoners themselves, that the worthy justices were disposed to take as favourable a view of smuggling transactions as possible. But the law was very clear; the case was not less so; Mowle, the principal riding officer, was a straightforward, determined, and shrewd man; and although Sir Robert Croyland, simply with a view of protracting the investigation till Mr. Radford should arrive,

started many questions which he left to the other magistrates to settle, yet in about half an hour the charge of smuggling, with riot, and armed resistance to the Custom-House officers, was clearly made out against the major and his two companions; and as the act left no discretion in such a case, the resistance raising the act to felony, all three were committed for trial, and the officers bound over to prosecute.

The men were then taken away, laughing and jesting; and Sir Robert Croyland looked with anxiety for the appearance of the next party; but two other men were now introduced without Richard Radford; and the worthy baronet was released for the time. The case brought forward against these prisoners differed from that against those who preceded them, inasmuch as no resistance was charged. They had simply been found aiding and abetting in the carriage of the smuggled goods, and had fled when they found themselves pursued by the officers, though not fast enough to avoid capture. The facts were speedily proved, and, indeed, much more rapidly than suited the views of Sir Robert Croyland. He therefore raised the question, when the decision of the magistrates was about to be pronounced, whether this was the first or the second offence, affecting some remembrance of the face of one of the men. The officers, also, either really did recollect, or pretended to do so, that the person of whom he spoke had been convicted before; but the man himself positively denied it, and defied them to bring forward any proof. A long discussion thus commenced, and before it was terminated the baronet was relieved by the appearance of Mr. Radford himself, who entered booted and spurred, and covered with dust, as if just returned from a long ride.

Shaking hands with his brother magistrates, and especially with Sir Robert Croyland, he was about to seat himself at the end of that table, when the baronet rose, saying, "Here, Radford, you had better take my place, as I must positively get home directly, having important business to transact."

"No, no, Sir Robert," replied that respectable magistrate, we cannot spare you in this case, nor can I take that place. My son, I hear, is charged with taking part in this affair; and some sharp words have been passing between myself and that scoundrel

of a fellow called Clinch, the officer, who applied to me for aid in searching the Ramleys' house. When I agreed to go with him, and found out a very snug place for hiding, he was half afraid to go down; and yet, since then, he has thought fit to insinuate that I had something to do with the run, and did not conduct the search fairly."

The magistrates looked round to each other and smiled; and Radford himself laughed heartily, very much as if he was acting a part in a farce, without any hope or expectation of passing off his zeal in the affair, upon his fellow magistrates, as genuine. Mowle, the officer, at the same time turned round, and spoke a few words to two men who had followed Mr. Radford into the room, one of whom shrugged his shoulders with a laugh, and said nothing, and the other replied eagerly, but in a low tone.

Sir Robert Croyland, however, urged the necessity of his going, put his watch in his pocket, and buttoned up his coat. But Mr. Radford, assuming a graver air and a very peculiar tone, replied, "No, no, Sir Robert; you must stay, indeed. We shall want you. Your known impartiality will give weight to our decisions, whatever they may be."

The baronet sat down again, but evidently with so much unwillingness, that his brethren marvelled not a little at this fresh instance of the influence which Mr. Radford exerted over his mind.

"Who is the next prisoner, Mr. Mowle?" demanded Sir Robert Croyland, as soon as he had resumed his seat.

"Mr. Richard Radford, I suppose, Sir," said Mowle; "but these two men are not disposed of."

"Well, then," said Mr. Jollivet, who was very well inclined to commence a career of lenity, "as no proof has been given that this is the second offence, I think we must send them both for a month. That seems to me the utmost we can do."

The other magistrates concurred in this decision; and the prisoners were ordered to be removed; but ere they went, the one against whom the officers had most seriously pressed their charge, turned round towards the bench, exclaiming, in a gay tone,

“Thank you, Squire Jollyboat. Your worship shall have a chest of tea for this, before I’m out a fortnight.”

A roar of laughter ran round the magistrates—for such matters were as indecently carried on in those days, on almost all occasions, as they sometimes are now; and in a moment or two after, young Radford was brought in, with a dark scowl upon his brow.

“How is this, Dick?” cried his father. “Have you been dabbling in a run, and suffered yourself to be caught?”

“Let these vagabonds make their accusation, and bring their witnesses,” replied the young man, sullenly, “and then I’ll speak for myself.”

“Well, your worships,” said Mowle, coming forward, “the facts are simply these: I have long had information that goods were to be run about this time, and that Mr. Radford had some share in the matter. Last night, a large quantity of goods were landed in the Marsh, though I had been told it was to be near about Sandgate, or between that and Hythe, and was consequently on the look-out there. As soon as I got intimation, however, that the run had been effected, I got together as many men as I could, sent for a party of dragoons from Folkestone, and, knowing pretty well which way they would take, came across by Aldington, Broadoak and Kingsnorth, and then away by Singleton Green, towards Four-Elms, where, just under the hill, we came upon those two men who have just been convicted, and two others, who got off. We captured these two, and three horse-loads they had with them, for their beasts were tired, and they had lagged behind. There were two or three chests of tea, and a good many other things, and all of them were marked, just like honest bales of goods, “Richard Radford, Esquire, Junior.” As we found, however, that the great party was on before, we pursued them as far as Rouse-end, where we overtook them all; but there they scattered, some galloping off towards Gouldwell, as if they were going to the Ramleys; some towards Usherhouse, and some by the wood towards Etchden. Four or five of the dragoons pushed after those running for Gouldwell, but I and the rest stuck to the main body, which went away towards the wood,

and who showed fight. There was a good deal of firing amongst the trees, but not much damage done, except to my horse, who was shot in the shoulder. But just as we were chasing them out of the wood, up came Mr. Richard Radford, who was seen for a minute speaking to one of the men who were running, and riding along beside him for some way. He then turned, and came up to us, and tried to stop us as we were galloping after them, asking what the devil we were about, and giving us a great deal of bad language. I didn't mind him, but rode on, knowing we could take him at any time; but Mr. Birchett, the other chief officer, who had captured the major a minute or two before, got angry, and caught him by the collar, charging him to surrender, when he instantly drew his sword, and threatened to run him through. One of the dragoons, however, knocked it out of his hand, and then he was taken. This affray in the middle of the road enabled the greater part of the rest to get off; and we only captured two more horses and one man."

Several of the other officers, and the dragoons, corroborated Mowle's testimony; and the magistrates, but especially Sir Robert Croyland, began to look exceedingly grave. Mr. Radford, however, only laughed, turning to his son, and asking, "Well, Dick! what have you to say to all this?"

Richard Radford, however, merely tossed up his head, and threw back his shoulders, without reply, till Sir Robert Croyland addressed him, saying, I hope, Mr. Radford, you can clear yourself of this charge, for you ought to know that armed resistance to the King's officers is a transportable offence."

"I will speak to the magistrates," replied young Radford, "when I can speak freely, without all these people about me. As to the goods they mention, marked with my name, I know nothing about them."

"Do you wish to speak with the magistrates alone?" demanded old Mr. Radford.

"I must strongly object to any such proceeding," exclaimed Mowle.

"Pray, Sir, meddle with what concerns you," said old Radford, turning upon him fiercely, "and do not pretend to dictate

here. You gentlemen are greatly inclined to forget your place. I think that the room had better be cleared of all but the prisoner, Sir Robert."

The baronet bowed his head; Squire Jollivet concurred in the same opinion; and, though one or two of the others hesitated, they were ultimately overruled, and the room was cleared of all persons but the magistrates and the culprit.

Scarcely was this done, when, with a bold free air, and contemptuous smile, young Radford advanced to the side of the table, and laid his left hand firmly upon it; then, looking round from one to another, he said, "I will ask you a question, worshipful gentlemen. — Is there any one of you, here present, who has never, at any time, had anything to do with a smuggling affair? — Can you swear it upon your oaths? — Can you, Sir? — Can you? Can you?"

The magistrates to whom he addressed himself, looked marvellously rueful, and replied not; and at last, turning to his father, he said, "Can you, Sir? though I, methinks, need hardly ask the question."

"No, by Jove, Dick, I can't!" replied his father, laughing. "I wish to Heaven you wouldn't put such awful interrogatories; for I believe, for that matter, we are all in the same boat."

"Then I refuse," said young Radford, "to be judged by you. Settle the matter as you like. — Get out of the scrape as you can; but don't venture to convict a man when you are more guilty than he is himself. If you do, I may tell a few tales that may not be satisfactory to any of you."

It had been remarked, that, in putting his questions, the young gentleman had entirely passed Sir Robert Croyland; and Mr. Jollivet whispered to the gentleman next him, "I think we had better leave him and Sir Robert to settle it, for I believe the baronet is quite clear of the scrape."

But Mr. Radford had overheard, and he exclaimed, "No, no; I think the matter is quite clear how we must proceed. There's not the slightest proof given that he knew anything about these goods being marked with his name, or that it was done by his authority. He was not with the men either, who were carrying the

goods; and they were going quite away from his own dwelling. He happened to come there accidentally, just when the fray was going on. That I can prove, for I sent him a note this morning, telling him to join me at Ashford as fast as possible."

"I saw it delivered myself," said Sir Robert Croyland.

"To be sure," rejoined Mr. Radford; "and then, as to his talking to the smugglers when he did come up, I dare say he was telling them to surrender, or not to resist the law. Wasn't it so, Dick?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Richard Radford, boldly. "I told them to be off as fast as they could. But I did tell them not to fire any more. That's true enough!"

"Ay, to be sure," cried Mr. Radford. "He was trying to persuade them not to resist legitimate authority."

Almost all the magistrates burst into a fit of laughter; but, no way disconcerted, worthy Mr. Radford went on saying — "While he was doing this, up comes this fellow, Birchett, and seizes him by the collar; and, I dare say, he abused him into the bargain."

"He said I was a d—d smuggling blackguard myself," said young Radford.

"Well, then, gentlemen, is it at all wonderful that he drew his sword?" demanded his respectable father. "Is every gentleman in the county to be ridden over, rough-shod, by these officers and their dragoons, and called 'd—d smuggling blackguards,' when they are actually engaged in persuading the smugglers not to fire? I promise you, my son shall bring an action against that fellow, Birchett, for an assault. It seems to me that the case is quite clear."

"It is, at all events, rendered doubtful," said Sir Robert Croyland, "by what has been suggested. I think the officers had better now be recalled; and, by your permission, I will put a few questions to them."

In a very few minutes the room was, once more, nearly filled, and the baronet addressed Mowle, in a grave tone, saying — "A very different view of this case has been afforded us, Mr. Mowle, from that which you gave just now. It is distinctly proved, and I

myself can in some degree testify to the fact, that Mr. Radford was on the spot accidentally, having been sent for by his father to join him at Ashford — ”

“At the Ramleys’, I suppose you mean, Sir,” observed Mowle, drily.

“No, Sir; at Ashford,” rejoined Mr. Radford; and Sir Robert Croyland proceeded to say:

“The young gentleman also asserts that he was persuading the smugglers to submit to lawful authority, or, at all events, not to fire upon you. Was there any more firing after he came up?”

“No; there was not,” answered Mowle. “They all galloped off as hard as they could.”

“Corroborative proof of his statement,” observed Sir Robert, solemnly. “The only question, therefore, remaining, seems to be, as to whether Mr. Radford, junior, had really anything to do with the placing of his name upon the goods. Now, one strong reason for supposing such not to be the case is, that they were not found near his house, or going towards it, but the contrary.”

“Why, he’s as much at home in the Ramleys’ house as at his own,” said a voice from behind; but Sir Robert took no notice, and proceeded to inquire — “Have you proof, Mr. Mowle, that he authorized any one to mark these goods with his name?”

Mr. Radford smiled; and Mowle, the officer, looked a little puzzled. At length, however, he answered — “No, I can’t say we have, Sir Robert; but one thing is very certain, it is not quite customary to ask for such proof in this stage of the business, and in the cases of inferior men.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” replied Sir Robert Croyland, in a dignified and sententious tone, “for it is quite necessary that in all cases the evidence should be clear and satisfactory to justify the magistrates in committing any man to prison, even for trial. In this instance nothing is proved, and not even a fair cause for suspicion made out. Mr. Radford was there accidentally; the goods were going in a different direction from his house; he was seized, we think upon insufficient grounds, while endeavouring to dissuade the smugglers from resisting the king’s officers and troops; and though we may judge his opposition imprudent, it

was not wholly unjustifiable. The prisoner is therefore discharged."

"The goods were going to the Ramleys," said the man, Clinch, who now, emboldened by the presence of several other officers, spoke loud and decidedly. "Here are two or three of the Dragoons, who can swear that they followed a party of the smugglers nearly to the house, and had the gates shut in their face when they came up; and I can't help saying, that the search of the house by Mr. Radford was not conducted as it ought to have been. The two officers were left without, while he went in to speak with old Ramley, and there were a dozen of men, or more, in the kitchen."

"Pooh! nonsense; fellow," cried Mr. Radford, interrupting him with a laugh; "I did it for your own security."

"And then," continued Clinch, "when we had gone down into the concealed cellar below, which was as clear a *hide* for smuggled goods as ever was seen, he would not let me carry out the search, though I found that two places at the sides were hollow, and only covered with boards."

"Why, you vagabond, you were afraid of going down at all!" said Mr. Radford. "Where is Adams? He can bear witness of it."

"Clinch didn't seem to like it much, it must be confessed," said Adams, without coming forward; "but, then, the place was so full of men, it was enough to frighten one."

"I wasn't frightened," rejoined Mr. Radford.

"Because it was clear enough that you and the Ramleys understood each other," answered Clinch, boldly.

"Pooh — pooh, nonsense!" said Squire Jollivet. "You must not talk such stuff here, Mr. Clinch. But, however that may be, the prisoner is discharged; and now, as I think we have no more business before us, we may all go home; for it's nearly five o'clock, and I, for one, want my dinner."

"Ay, it is nearly five o'clock," said young Radford, who had been standing with his eyes cast down and his brow knit; "and you do not know what you have all done, keeping me here in this way."

He added an oath, and then flung out of the room, passing

through the crowd of officers and others, in his way towards the door, without waiting for his father, who had risen with the rest of the magistrates, and was preparing to depart.

Sir Robert Croyland and Mr. Radford descended the stairs of the inn together; and at the bottom, Mr. Radford shook the baronet heartily by the hand, saying, loud enough to be heard by everybody, "That was admirably well done, Sir Robert! Many thanks — many thanks."

"None to me, my dear Sir," answered Sir Robert Croyland. "It was but simple justice;" and he turned away to mount his horse.

"Very pretty justice, indeed!" said Mowle, in a low voice, to the sergeant of Dragoons; "but I can't help fancying there's something more under this than meets the eye. Mr. Radford isn't a gentleman who usually laughs at these matters so lightly. But if he thinks to cheat me, perhaps he may find himself mistaken."

In the meantime the baronet hastened homewards, putting his horse into a quick pace, and taking the nearest roads through the woods, which were then somewhat thickly scattered over that part of Kent. He had no servant with him; and when at about two miles from his own house, he passed through a wild and desolate part of the country, near what is now called Chequer Tree, he looked on before and around him on every side, somewhat anxiously, as if he did not much admire the aspect of the place.

He pushed on, however, entered the wood, and rode rapidly down into a deep dell, which may still be seen in that neighbourhood, though its wild and gloomy character is now almost altogether lost. At that time, tall trees grew up round it on either hand, leaving, in the hollow, a little patch of about half an acre, filled with long grass and some stunted willows, while the head of a stream bubbling up in their shade, poured on its clear waters through a fringe of sedges and rushes towards some larger river.

The sun had yet an hour or two to run before his setting; but it was only at noon of a summer's day that his rays ever penetrated into that gloomy and secluded spot; and towards the evening it had a chilly and desolate aspect, which made one feel as if it were

a place debarred for ever of the bright light of day. The green tints of spring, or the warmer brown of autumn, seemed to make no difference, for the shades were always blue, dull and heavy, mingling with the thin filmy mist that rose up from the plashy ground on either side of the road.

A faint sort of shudder came over Sir Robert Croyland, probably from the damp air; and he urged his horse rapidly down the hill without any consideration for the beast's knees. He was spurring on towards the other side, as if eager to get out of it, when a voice was heard from amongst the trees, exclaiming, in a sad and melancholy tone, "Robert Croyland! Robert Croyland! what look you for here?"

The baronet turned on his saddle with a look of terror and anguish; but, instead of stopping, he dug his spurs into the horse's sides, and galloped up the opposite slope. As if irresistibly impelled to look at that which he dreaded, he gazed round twice as he ascended, and each time beheld, standing in the middle of the road, the same figure, wrapped in a large dark cloak, which he had seen when first the voice caught his ear. Each time he averted his eyes in an instant, and spurred on more furiously than ever. His accelerated pace, soon carried him to the top of the hill, where he could see over the trees; and in about a quarter of an hour, he reached Halden, when he began to check his horse, and reasoned with himself on his own sensations. There was a great struggle in his mind; but ere he arrived at Harbourne House he had gained sufficient mastery over himself to say, "What a strange thing imagination is!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT a varying thing is the stream of life! How it sparkles and glitters! Now it bounds along its pebbly bed, sometimes in sunshine, and sometimes in shade; sometimes sporting round all things, as if its essence were merriment and brightness; sometimes flowing solemnly on, as if it were derived from Lethe itself. Now it runs like a liquid diamond along the meadow; now it plunges in fume and fury over the rock; now it is clear and limpid,

as youth and innocence can make it; now it is heavy and turbid, with the varying streams of thought and memory that are ever flowing into it, each bringing its store of dulness and pollution as it tends towards the end. Its voice, too, varies as it goes; now it sings lightly as it dances on; now it roars amidst the obstacles that oppose its way; and now it has no tone but the dull low murmur of exhausted energy.

Such is the stream of life! yet, perhaps, few of us would wish to change our portion of it for the calm regularity of a canal—even if one could be constructed without locks and flood-gates upon it to hold in the pent-up waters of the heart till they are ready to burst through the banks.

Life was in its sparkling aspect with Zara Croyland and Sir Edward Digby, when they set out on horseback for the house of old Mr. Croyland, cantering easily along the roads of that part of the country, which, in the days I speak of, were soft and somewhat sandy. Two servants followed behind at a discreet distance; and lightly passing over hill and dale, with all the loveliness of a very bright portion of our fair land stretched out around them, the young lady and her companion drew in, through the eyes, fresh sensations of happiness from all the lovely things of nature. The yellow woods warmed their hearts; the blue heaven raised their thoughts; the soft air refreshed and cheered all their feelings; and, when a passing cloud swept over the sky, it only gave that slight shadowy tone to the mind, which wakens within us the deep, innate, and elevating movements of the spirit, that seem to connect the aspect of God's visible creation, with a higher and a purer state of being. Each had some spring of happiness in the heart fresh opened; for, to the fair girl who went bounding along through that gay world, the thought that she was conveying to a dear sister tidings of hope, was in itself a joy; and to her companion a new subject of contemplation was presenting itself, in the very being who accompanied him on the way—a subject quite untouched and novel, and, to a man of his character and disposition, a most interesting one.

Sir Edward Digby had mingled much with the world; he had seen many scenes of different kinds; he had visited various

countries, the most opposite to each other; he had frequented courts, and camps, and cities; and he had known and seen a good deal of woman, and of woman's heart; but he had never yet met any one like Zara Croyland. The woman of fashion and of rank in all the few modifications of character that her circumstances admit — for rank and fashion are sadly like the famous bed of the robber of Attica, on which all men are cut down or stretched out to a certain size, — was well known to him, and looked upon much in the light of an exotic plant, kept in an artificial state of existence, with many beauties and excellences, perhaps, mingling with many deformities and faults, but still weakened and deprived of individuality by long drilling in a round of conventionalities. He had seen, too, the wild Indian, in the midst of her native woods, and might have sometimes admired the free grace and wild energy of uncultivated and unperverted nature; but he was not very fond of barbarism, and though he might admit the existence of fine qualities, even in a savage, yet he had not been filled with any great enthusiasm in favour of Indian life, from what he had seen in Canada. The truth is, he had never been a very dissolute, or, as it is termed, a very gay man — he was not sated and surfeited with the vices of civilization, and consequently was not inclined to seek for new excitement in the very opposite extreme of primeval rudeness.

Most of the gradations between the two, he had seen at different periods and in different lands; but yet in her who now rode along beside him, there was something different from any. It was not a want, but a combination of the qualities he had remarked in others. There was the polish and the cultivation of high class and finished training, with a slight touch of the wildness and the originality of the fresh unsophisticated heart. There was the grace of education, and the grace of nature; and there seemed to be high natural powers of intellect, uncurbed by artificial rules, but supplied with materials by instruction.

All this was apparent; but the question with him was, as to the heart beneath, and its emotions. He gazed upon her as they went on — when she was not looking that way — he watched her countenance, the habitual expression of the features, and the

varying expression which every emotion produced. Her face seemed like a bright looking-glass, which a breath will dim, and a touch will brighten; but there is so much deceit in the world, and every man who has mingled with that world must have seen so much of it, and every man, also, has within himself such internal and convincing proofs of our human nature's fondness for seeming, that we are all inclined — except in very early youth — to doubt the first impression, to inquire beyond the external appearance, and to inquire if the heart of the fruit corresponds with the beauty of the outside.

He asked himself what was she really? — what was true, and what was false, in that bright and sparkling creature? Whether, was the gaiety or the sadness the real character of the mind within? or whether the frequent variation from the one to the other — ay, and from energy to lightness, from softness to firmness, from gentleness to vigour — were not all the indications of a character as various as the moods which it assumed.

Sir Edward Digby was resolved not to fall in love, which is the most dangerous resolution that a man can take; for it is seldom, if ever, taken, except in a case of great necessity — one of those hasty outworks thrown up against a powerful enemy, which are generally taken in a moment and the cannon therein turned against ourselves.

Nevertheless, he had resolved, as I have said, not to fall in love; and he fancied that, strengthened by that resolution, he was quite secure. It must not be understood, indeed, that Sir Edward Digby never contemplated marriage. On the contrary, he thought of it as a remote evil that was likely to fall upon him some day, by an inevitable necessity. It seemed a sort of duty, indeed, to transmit his name, and honours, and wealth to another generation; and as duties are not always very pleasant things, he, from time to time, looked forward to the execution of his, in this respect, in a calm, philosophical, determined manner. Thirty-five, he thought, would be a good time to marry; and when he did so, he had quite made up his mind to do it with the utmost deliberation and coolness. It should be quite a *mariage de raison*. He would take it as a dose of physic — a disagreeable

thing, to be done when necessary, but not a minute before; and in the meantime, to fall in love, was quite out of the question.

No, he was examining and investigating and contemplating Zara Croyland's character, merely as a matter of interesting speculation; and a very dangerous speculation it was, Sir Edward Digby! I don't know which was most perilous, that, or your resolution.

It is very strange, he never recollected that, in no other case in his whole career, had he found it either necessary to take such a resolution, or pleasant to enter into such a speculation. If he had, perhaps he might have begun to tremble for himself. Nor did he take into the calculation the very important fact that Zara Croyland was both beautiful and pretty — two very different things, reader, as you will find, if you examine. A person may be very pretty without being the least beautiful, or very beautiful without being the least pretty; but when those two qualities are both combined, and when, in one girl, the beauty of features and of form that excites admiration, is joined with that prettiness of expression, and colouring, and arrangement that wakens tenderness and wins affection, Lord have mercy upon the man who rides along with her through fair scenes, under a bright sky!

Digby did not at all find out, that he was in the most dangerous situation in the world; or, if some fancy ever came upon him, that he was not quite safe, it was but as one of those vague impressions of peril that float for a single instant over the mind when we are engaged in any very bold and exciting undertaking, and pass away again as fast.

Far from guarding himself at all, Sir Edward Digby went on in his unconsciousness, laying himself more and more open to the enemy. In pursuit of his scheme of investigation, he proceeded, as they rode along, to try the mind of his fair companion in a thousand different ways; and every instant he brought forth some new and dangerous quality. He found that, in the comparative solitude in which she lived, she had had time for study as well as thought, and had acquired far more, and far more varied stores of information, than was common with the young women of her day. It was not alone that she could read and spell — which a

great many could not, in those times, — but she had read a number of different works upon a number of different subjects; knew as much of other lands, and of the habits of other people, as books could give, and was tastefully proficient in the arts that brighten life, even where their cultivation is not its object.

Thus her conversation had always something new about it. The very images that suggested themselves to her mind were derived from such numerous sources, that it kept the fancy on the stretch to follow her in her flights, and made their whole talk a sort of playful chase, like that of one bird after another in the air. Now she borrowed a comparison for something sensible to the eye from the sweet music that charms the ear — now she found out links of association between the singing of the birds and some of the fine paintings that she had seen or heard of — now combined a bright scene, or a peculiar moment of happiness, with the sweet odours of the flowers or the murmur of the stream. With everything in nature and art she sported, apparently unconscious; and often, too, in speaking of the emotions of the heart or the thoughts of the mind, she would, with a bright flash of imagination, cast lights upon those dark and hidden things, from objects in the external world, or from the common events of life.

Eagerly Digby led her on — pleased, excited, entertained himself; but in so doing he produced an effect which he had not calculated upon. He made a change in her feelings towards himself. She had thought him a very agreeable man from the first; she had seen that he was a gentleman by habit, and divined that he was so by nature; but now she began to think that he was a very high-toned and noble-minded man, that he was one worthy of high station and of all happiness — she did not say — of affection, nor let the image of love pass distinctly before her eyes. There might be a rosy cloud in the far sky wherein the god was veiled; but she did not see him — or, was it that she would not? Perhaps it was so; for woman's heart is often as perverse and blind, in these matters, as man's. But one thing is clear, no two people can thus pour forth the streams of congenial thought and feeling — to flow on mingling together in sweet communion — for any great length of time, without a change of their sensations towards

each other; and, unless the breast be well guarded by passion for another, it is not alone that mind with mind is blended, but heart with heart.

Though the distance was considerable, — that is to say, some three or four miles, and they made it more than twice as long by turning up towards the hills, to catch a fine view of the wooded world below, on whose beauty Zara expatiated eloquently, — and though they talked of a thousand different subjects, which I have not paused to mention here, lest the detail should seem all too tedious, yet their ride passed away briefly, like a dream. At length, coming through some green lanes, overhung by young saplings and a crown of brambles and other hedge-row shrubs — no longer, alas, in flower — they caught sight of the chimneys of a house a little way farther on, and Zara said, with a sigh, “There is my uncle’s house.”

Sir Edward Digby asked himself, “Why does she sigh?” and as he did so, felt inclined to sigh, too; for the ride had seemed too short, and had now become as a pleasant thing passed away. But then he thought, “We shall enjoy it once again as we return;” and he took advantage of their slackened pace to say, “As I know you are anxious to speak with your sister, Miss Croyland, I will contrive to occupy your uncle for a time, if we find him at home. I fear I shall not be able to obtain an opportunity of talking with her myself on the subjects that so deeply interest her, as at one time I hoped to do; but I am quite sure, from what I see of you, that I may depend upon what you tell me, and act accordingly.”

As if by mutual consent, they had avoided, during their expedition of that morning, the subject which was, perhaps, most in the thoughts of each; but now Zara checked her horse to a slow walk, and replied, after a moment’s thought, “I should think, if you desire it, you could easily obtain a few minutes’ conversation with her at my uncle’s. — I only don’t know whether it may agitate her too much or not. Perhaps you had better let me speak with her first, and then, if she wishes it, she will easily find the means. You may trust to me, indeed, Sir Edward, in Edith’s case, though I do not always say exactly what I mean about myself. Not that I have done otherwise with you; for, indeed, I

have neither had time nor occasion; but with the people that occasionally come to the house, sometimes it is necessary, and sometimes I am tempted, out of pure perversity, to make them think me very different from what I am. It is not always with those that I hate or despise either, but sometimes with people that I like and esteem very much. Now, I dare say poor Harry Layton has given you a very sad account of me?"

"No, indeed," answered Sir Edward Digby; "you do him wrong; I have not the least objection to tell you exactly what he said."

"Oh, do—do!" cried Zara; "I should like to hear very much, for I am afraid I used to tease him terribly."

"He said," replied Digby, "that when last he saw you, you were a gay, kind-hearted girl of fourteen, and that he was sure, if I spoke to you about him, you would tell me all that I wanted to know with truth and candour."

"That was kind of him," said Zara, with some emotion, "that was very kind. I am glad he knows me; and yet that very candour, Sir Edward, some people call affectation, and some impudence. I am afraid that those who know much of the world never judge rightly of those who know little of it. Sincerity is a commodity so very rare, I am told, in the best society, that those who meet with it never believe that they have got the genuine article."

"I know a good deal of the world," replied the young baronet, "but yet, my dear Miss Croyland, I do not think that I have judged you wrongly;" and he fell into thought.

The next moment they turned up to the house of old Mr. Croyland; and while the servants were holding the horses, and Zara, with the aid of Sir Edward Digby, dismounting at the door, they saw, to her horror and consternation, a large, yellow coach coming down the hill towards the house, which she instantly recognised as her father's family vehicle.

"My aunt, my aunt, upon my life!" exclaimed Zara, with a rueful shake of the head. "I must speak one word with Edith before she comes: so forgive me, Sir Edward," and she darted

into the house, asking a black servant, in a shawl turban and a long white gown, where Miss Croyland was to be found.

"She out in de garden, pretty missy," replied the man; and Zara ran on through the vestibule before her. Unfortunately, vestibules will have doors communicating with them, which, I have often remarked, have an unhappy propensity to open when any one is anxious to pass by them quietly. It was so in the present instance: roused from a reverie by the ringing of the bell, and the sound of voices without, Mr. Croyland issued forth just at the moment when Zara's light foot was carrying her across to the garden; and catching her by the arm, he detained her, asking, "What brought you here, saucy girl, and whither are you running so fast?"

Now Zara, though she was not good Mr. Zachary's favourite, had a very just appreciation of her uncle's character, and knew that the simple truth was less dangerous with him than with nine hundred and ninety-nine persons out of a thousand in civilized society. She, therefore, replied at once, "Don't stop me, uncle, there's a good man! I came to speak a few words to Edith, and wish to speak them before my aunt arrives."

"What! plot and counterplot, I will warrant!" exclaimed Mr. Croyland, freeing her arm. "Well, get you gone, you graceless monkey! Ha! who have we here? Why, my young friend, the half-bottle man! Are you one of the plotters too, Sir Edward?"

"Oh, I am a complete master in the art of domestic strategy, I assure you," answered the young officer, "and I propose — having heard what Miss Croyland has just said — that we take up a position across these glass doors, in order to favour her operations. We can then impede the advance of Mrs. Barbara's corps, by throwing forward the light-infantry of small-talk, assure her it is a most beautiful day, tell her that the view from the hill is lovely, and that the slight yellowness of September gives a fine warmth to the green foliage — with various other pieces of information which she does not desire — till the manœuvres in our rear are complete."

"Ah, you are a sad knave," replied Mr. Zachary Croyland,

laughing, "and, I see, are quite ready to aid the young in bamboozling the old."

But, alas, the best schemed campaign is subject to accidental impediments in execution, which will often deprive it of success! Almost as Mr. Croyland spoke, the carriage rolled up; and not small was the horror of the master of the house, to see riding behind it, on a tall grey horse, no other than young Richard Radford. Sir Edward Digby, though less horrified, was not well pleased; but it was Mr. Croyland who spoke, and that in rather a sharp and angry tone, stepping forward, at the same time, over the threshold of his door: "Mr. Radford," he said — "Mr. Radford, I am surprised to see you! You must very well know, that although I tolerate, and am obliged to tolerate, a great many people whom I don't approve, at my brother's house, your society is not that which I particularly desire."

Young Radford's eyes flashed, but, for once in his life, he exercised some command over himself. "I came here at your sister's suggestion, Sir," he said.

"Oh, Barbara, Barbara! barbarous Barbara!" exclaimed Mr. Zachary Croyland, shaking his head at his sister, who was stepping out of the carriage. "The devil himself never invented an instrument better fitted to torment the whole human race, than a woman with the best intentions in the world."

"Why, my dear brother," said Mrs. Barbara, with the look of a martyr, "you know quite well that Robert wishes Mr. Radford to have the opportunity of paying his addresses to Edith, and so I proposed —"

"He shan't have the opportunity here, by Vishnoo!" cried the old gentleman.

"To say the truth," said Mr. Radford, interposing, "such was not my object in coming hither to-day. I wished to have the honour of saying a few words to a gentleman I see standing behind you, Sir, which was also the motive of my going over to Harbourne House. Otherwise, well knowing your prejudices, I should not have troubled you; for, I can assure you, that *your* company is not particularly agreeable to *me*."

"If mine is what you want, Sir," replied Sir Edward Digby,

stepping forward and passing Mr. Croyland, "it is very easily obtained; but, as it seems you are not a welcome guest here, perhaps we had better walk along the lane together."

"A less distance than that will do," answered Richard Radford, throwing the bridle of his horse to one of the servants, and taking two or three steps away from the house.

"Oh, Zachary, my dear brother, do interfere!" exclaimed Mrs. Barbara. "I forgot they had quarrelled yesterday morning, and unfortunately let out that Sir Edward was here. There will be a duel, if you don't stop them."

"Not I," cried Mr. Croyland, rubbing his hands; "it's a pleasure to see two fools cut each other's throats. I'd lay any wager — if I ever did such a thing as lay wagers at all — that Digby pricks him through the midriff. There's a nice little spot at the end of the garden quite fit for such exercises."

Mr. Zachary Croyland was merely playing upon his sister's apprehensions, as the best sort of punishment he could inflict for the mischief she had brought about; but he never had the slightest idea that Sir Edward Digby and young Radford would come to anything like extreme measures in his sister's presence, knowing the one to be a gentleman, and mistakenly believing the other to be a coward. The conversation of the two who had walked away was not of long duration: nor, for a time, did it appear very vehement. Mr. Radford said something, and the young Baronet replied; Mr. Radford rejoined, and Digby answered the rejoinder. Then some new observation was made by the other, which seemed to cause Sir Edward to look round to the house, and, seeing Mr. Croyland and his sister still on the step, to make a sign for young Radford to follow to a greater distance. The latter, however, planted the heel of his boot tight in the gravel, as if to give emphasis to what he said, and uttered a sentence in a louder tone, and with a look so fierce, meaning, and contemptuous, that Mr. Croyland saw the matter was getting serious, and stepped forward to interfere.

In an instant, however, Sir Edward Digby, apparently provoked beyond bearing, raised the heavy horsewhip which he had in his hand, and laid it three or four times, with great rapidity,

over Mr. Radford's shoulders. The young man instantly dropped his own whip, drew his sword, and made a fierce lunge at the young officer's breast. The motion was so rapid, and the thrust so well aimed, that Digby had barely time to put it aside with his riding-whip, receiving a wound in his left shoulder as he did so. But the next moment his sword was also out of the sheath, and, after three sharp passes, young Radford's blade was flying over the neighbouring hedge, and a blow in the face from the hilt of Sir Edward Digby's weapon brought him with his knee to the ground.

The whole of this scene passed as quick as lightning; and I have not thought fit to interrupt the narration for the purpose of recording, in order, the four, several, piercing shrieks with which Mrs. Barbara Croyland accompanied each act of the drama. The first, however, was loud enough to call Zara from the garden, even before she had found her sister; and she came up to her aunt's side just at the moment that young Radford was disarmed, and then struck in the face by his opponent.

Slightly heated, Sir Edward gazed at him with his weapon in his hand; and the young lady, clasping her hands, exclaimed aloud, "Hold, Sir Edward! Sir Edward! for Heaven's sake!"

Sir Edward Digby turned round with a faint smile, thrust his sword back into the sheath, and, without bestowing another word on his adversary, walked slowly back to the door of the house, and apologized to Mrs. Barbara for what had occurred, saying, "I beg you ten thousand pardons, my dear Madam, for treating you to such a sight as this; but I can assure you it is not my seeking. That person, who failed to keep an appointment with me yesterday, thought fit twice just now to call me coward; and as he would not walk to a little distance, I had no resource but to horse-whip him where I stood."

"Pity you didn't run him through the liver!" observed Mr. Croyland.

While these few words were passing, young Radford rose slowly, paused for an instant to gaze upon the ground, and then, gnawing his lip, approached his horse's side. There is, perhaps, no passion of the human heart more dire, more terrible than impotent revenge, or more uncontrollable in its effect upon the

human countenance. The face of Richard Radford, handsome as it was in many respects, was at the moment when he put his foot into the stirrup and swung himself up to the saddle, perfectly frightful, from the fiend-like expression of rage and disappointment that it bore. He felt that he was powerless — for a time, at least; that he had met an adversary greatly superior to himself, both in skill and strength; and that he had suffered not only defeat but disgrace, before the eyes of a number of persons whom his own headstrong fury had made spectators of a scene so painful to himself. Reining his horse angrily back to clear him of the carriage, he shook his fist at Sir Edward Digby, exclaiming, “Sooner or later, I will have revenge!” Then, striking the beast’s flank with his spurs, he turned and galloped away.

Digby had, as we have seen, addressed his apologies to Mrs. Barbara Croyland; but after hearing, with a calm smile, his vanquished opponent’s empty threat, he looked round to the fair companion of his morning’s ride, and saw her standing beside her uncle, with her cheek very pale and her eyes cast down to the ground.

“Do not be alarmed, Miss Croyland,” he said, bending down his head, and speaking in a low and gentle tone. “This affair can have no other results. It is all over now.”

Zara raised her eyes to his face, but, as she did so, turned more pale than before; and pointing to his arm — where the cloth of his coat was cut through, and the blood flowing down over his sleeve and dropping from the ruffle round his wrist — she exclaimed, “You are hurt, Sir Edward! Good Heaven! he has wounded you!”

“A scratch — a scratch,” said Digby; “a mere nothing. A pocket-handkerchief tied round it, will soon remedy all the mischief he has done, though not all he intended.”

“Oh! come in — come in, and have it examined!” cried Zara, eagerly.

The rest of the party gathered round, joined, just at that moment, by Edith from the garden; and Mr. Croyland, tearing the coat wider open, looked at the wound with more experienced eyes, saying, “Ah, a flesh wound! but in rather an awkward

place. Not as wide as a church door, nor as deep as a draw-well, as our friend has it; but if it had been an inch and a half to the right, it would have divided the subclavian artery — and then, my dear Sir, ‘it would have done.’ This will get well soon. But come, Sir Neddy, let us into the house; and I will do for you what I haven’t done for ten or twelve years — *id est*, dress your wound myself: and mind, you must not drink any wine to-night.”

The whole party began to move into the house, Sir Edward Digby keeping as near the two Miss Croylands as possible, and laying out a little plan in his head for begging the assistance of Mrs. Barbara while his wound was dressed, and sending the two young ladies out of the room to hold their conference together. He was, however, destined to be frustrated here also. To Zara Croyland, it had been a day of unusual excitement; she had enjoyed, she had been moved, she had been agitated and terrified, and she was still under much greater alarm than perhaps was needful, both regarding Sir Edward Digby’s wound and the threat which young Radford had uttered. She felt her head giddy and her heart flutter as if oppressed; but she walked on steadily enough for four or five steps, while her aunt, Mrs. Barbara, was explaining to Edith, in her own particular way, all that had occurred. But just when the old lady was saying — “Then, whipping out his sword in an instant, he thrust at Sir Edward’s breast, and I thought to a certainty he was run through —” Zara sunk slowly down, caught by her sister as she fell, and the hue of death spread over her face.

“Fainted!” cried Mr. Croyland. “I wish to Heaven, Bab, you would hold your tongue! I will tell Edith about it afterwards. What’s the use of bringing it all up again before the girl’s mind, when the thing’s done and over? There, let her lie where she is; the recumbent position is the right thing. Bring a cushion out of the drawing-room, Edith, my love, and ask Baba for the harts-horn drops. We’ll soon get her better; and then the best thing you can do, Bab, is to put her into the carriage, take her home again, and hold your tongue to my brother about this foolish affair — if anything can hold a woman’s tongue. I’ll plaster up

the man's arm, and then, like many another piece of damaged goods, he'll be all right — on the outside at least.

Mrs. Barbara Croyland followed devoutly one part of her brother's injunctions. As soon as Zara was sufficiently recovered, she hurried her to the carriage, without leaving her alone with Edith for one moment; and Sir Edward Digby, having had his wound skilfully dressed by Mr. Zachary Croyland's own hands, thanked the old gentleman heartily for his care and kindness, mounted his horse, and rode back to Harbourne House.

CHAPTER XV.

WE must now return to the town of Hythe, and to the little room in the little inn, which that famous borough boasted as its principal hostelry, at the period of our tale. It was about eleven o'clock at night, perhaps a few minutes earlier; and in that room was seated a gentleman, whom we have left for a long time, though not without interest in himself and his concerns. But, as in this wayfaring world we are often destined for weeks, months — ay, and long years — to quit those whom we love best, and to work for their good in distant scenes, with many a thought given to them, but few means of communication; so, in every picture of human life which comprises more than one character, must we frequently leave those in whom we are most interested, while we are tracing out the various remote cords and pulleys of fate, by which the fabric of their destiny is ultimately reared.

The gentleman, then, who had been introduced to Mr. Croyland as Captain Osborn, was seated at a table, writing. A number of papers, consisting of letters, accounts, and several printed forms, unfilled up, were strewed upon the table around, which was moreover encumbered by a heavy sword and belt, a large pair of thick buckskin gloves, and a brace of heavy silver-mounted pistols. He looked pale and somewhat anxious; but nevertheless he went on, with his fine head bent, and the light falling from above upon his beautifully cut classical features — sometimes putting down a name, and adding a sum in figures opposite — sometimes, when he came to the bottom of the page, running up

the column with rapidity and ease, and then inscribing the sum total at the bottom.

It was perhaps, rather an unromantic occupation that the young officer was employed in; for it was evident that he was making up, with steady perseverance, some rather lengthy accounts; and all his thoughts seemed occupied with pounds, shillings, and pence. It was not so, indeed, though he wished it to be so; but, if the truth must be spoken, his mind often wandered afar; and his brain seemed to have got into that state of excitement, which caused sounds and circumstances that would at any other time have passed without notice, to trouble him and disturb his ideas on the present occasion.

There had been a card and punch club in one of the neighbouring rooms. The gentlemen had assembled at half-past six or seven, had hung up their wigs upon pegs provided for the purpose, and had made a great deal of noise in coming in and arranging themselves. There was then the brewing of the punch, the lighting of the pipes, and the laughing and jesting to which those important events generally give rise, at the meeting of persons of some importance in a country town; and then the cards were produced, and a great deal of laughing and talking, as usual, succeeded, in regard to the preliminaries, and also respecting the course of the game.

There had been no slight noise, also, in the lower regions of the inn, much speaking, and apparently some merriment; and, from all these things put together — to say nothing of, every now and then, the pleasures of a comic song, given by one of the parties above or below — the young officer had been considerably disturbed, and had been angry with himself for being so. His thoughts, too, would wander, whether he liked it or not.

“Digby must have seen her,” he said to himself, “unless she be absent; and surely he must have found some opportunity of speaking with herself or her sister by this time. I wonder I have not heard from him. He promised to write as soon as he had any information; and he is not a man to forget. Well, it is of no use to think of it;” and he went on — “five and six are eleven, and four are fifteen, and six are twenty-one.”

At this interesting point of his calculation, a dragoon, who was stationed at the door, put his head into the room, and said, "Mr. Mowle, Sir, wants to speak to you."

"Let him come in," answered the officer; and, laying down his pen, he looked up with a smile. "Well, Mr. Mowle!" he continued, "what news do you bring? Have you been successful?"

"No very good news, and but very little success, Sir," answered the officer of Customs, taking a seat to which the other pointed. "We have captured some of their goods, and taken six of the men, but the greater part of the cargo, and the greatest villain of them all, have been got off."

"Ay, how happened that?" asked the gentleman to whom he spoke. "I gave you all the men you required; and I should certainly have thought you were strong enough."

"Oh yes, Sir, that was not what we lacked," answered Mowle, in a somewhat bitter tone; "but I'll tell you what we did want — honest magistrates, and good information. Knowing the way they were likely to take, I cut straight across the country by Aldington, Kingsnorth, and Singleton-green, towards Four Elms —"

"It would have been better, I should think, to go on by Westhawk," said the young officer; "for though the road is rather hilly, you would by that means have cut them off, both from Singleton, Chart Magna, and Gouldwell, towards which places, I think you said, they were tending."

"Yes, Sir," replied the officer of Customs, "but we found, on the road, that we were rather late in the day, and that our only chance was by hard riding. We came up with four of them, however, who had lagged behind, about Four Elms. Two of these we got, and all their goods; and, from the information they gave, we galloped on as hard as we could to Rousend."

"Did you take the road, or across the country?" demanded the young officer.

"Birchett would take the road," answered Mowle.

"He was wrong — he was quite wrong," replied the other. "If you had passed by Newstreet, then straight over the fields and meadows, up to the mill, you would have had them in a trap."

They could not have reached Chart, or New Purchase, or Gouldwell, or Etchden, without your catching them; and if they had fallen back, they must have come upon the men I stationed at Bethersden, with whom was Adams, the officer."

"Why, you seem to know the country, Sir," said his companion, with some surprise, "as if you had lived in it all your days."

"I do know it very well," answered the officer of dragoons; "and you must be well aware that what I say is right. It was the shortest way, too, and presents no impediments but a couple of fences, and a ditch."

"All very true, Sir," answered Mowle, "and so I told Birchett; but Adams had gone off for another officer, and is very little use to us himself. — There's no trusting him, Sir. — However, we came up with them at Rousend, but there, after a little bit of a tussle, they separated;" and he went on to give his account of the affray with the smugglers, nearly in the same words which he had employed when speaking to the magistrates, some six or seven hours before. His hearer listened with grave attention; but when Mowle came to mention the appearance of Richard Radford, and his capture, the young officer's eyes flashed, and his brow knit; and as the man went on to describe the self-evident juggle which had been played, to enable the youth to evade the reach of justice, he rose from the table, and walked once or twice hastily up and down the room. Then, seating himself again, to all appearance as calm as before, he said, "This is too bad, Mr. Mowle, and shall be reported."

"Ay, Sir; but you have not heard the worst," answered Mowle. "These worthy justices thought fit to send the five men whom they had committed, off to gaol in a waggon, with three or four constables to guard them, and of course you know what took place."

"Oh, they were all rescued, of course!" replied the officer.

"Before they got to Headcorn," said Mowle. "But the whole affair was arranged by Mr. Radford; for these fellows say themselves, that it is better to work for him at half price, than for any one else, because he always stands by his own, and will see no

harm come to them. If this is to go on, Sir, you and I may as well leave the county."

"It shall not go on," answered the officer; "but we must have a little patience, my good friend. Long impunity makes a man rash. This worthy Mr. Radford seems to have become so already; otherwise, he would never have risked carrying so large a venture across the country in open day —"

"I don't think that, in this, he was rash at all, Sir," answered Mowle, lowering his tone, and speaking in a whisper; "and if you will listen for a moment, I'll tell you why. My belief is, that the whole of this matter is but a lure to take us off the right scent; and I have several reasons for thinking so. In the first place, the run was but a trifling affair, as far as I can learn — not worth five hundred pounds. I know that what we have got is not worth a hundred; and it has cost me as good a horse as I ever rode in my life. Now from all I hear, the cargo that Mr. Radford expects is the most valuable that ever was run from Dungeness Point to the North Foreland. So, if my information is correct, and I am sure it is —"

"Who did you get it from?" demanded the officer, "if the question is a fair one."

"Some such questions might not be," answered Mowle, "but I don't mind answering this, Colonel. I got it from Mr. Radford himself. — Ay, Sir, you may well look surprised; but I heard him, with my own ears, say that it was worth at least seventy thousand pounds. So you see my information is pretty good. Now, knowing this, as soon as I found out what value was in this lot, I said to myself, this is some little spec of young Radford's own. But when I came to consider the matter, I found, that must be a mistake too; for the old man helped the Ramleys out of their scrape so impudently, and took such pains to let it be well understood that he had an interest in the affair, that I felt sure there was some motive at the bottom, Sir. In all these things, he has shown himself from a boy, as cautious as he is daring, and that's the way he has made such a power of money. He's not a man to appear too much in a thing, even for his son's sake, if he has not some purpose to answer; and, depend upon it, I'm right, when

I say that this run was nothing but a trap, or a blind as they call it, to make us think — in case we've got any information of the great venture — that the thing is all over. Why did they choose the day, when they might have done it all at night? Why did Mr. Radford go on laughing with the magistrates, as if it was a good joke? No, no, Sir, the case is clear enough: they are going to strike their great stroke sooner than we supposed; and this is but a trifle."

"But may you not have made some mistake in regard to Mr. Radford's words?" demanded the young officer. "I should think it little likely that so prudent a man, as you represent him to be, would run so great a risk for such a purpose."

"I made no mistake," answered Mowle; "I heard the words clear enough; and, besides, I've another proof. The man who is to run the goods for him, had nothing to do with this affair. I've got sharp eyes upon him; and though he was away from home the other night, he was not at sea. That I've discovered. He was up in the county, not far from Mr. Radford's own place, and most likely saw him, though that I can't find out. However, Sir, I shall hear more very soon. Whenever it is to be done, we shall have sharp work of it, and must have plenty of men."

"My orders are to assist you to the best of my power," said the young officer, "and to give you what men you may require; but as I have been obliged to quarter them in different places, you had better give me as speedy information of what force you are likely to demand, and on what point you wish them to assemble, as you can."

"Those are puzzling questions, Colonel," replied Mowle. "I do not think the attempt will be made to-night; for their own people must be all knocked up, and they cannot bring down enough to carry as well as run — at least, I think not. But it will probably be made to-morrow, if they fancy they have lulled us; and that fancy I shall take care to indulge, by keeping a sharp look out, without seeming to look out at all. As to the point, that is what I cannot tell. Harding will start from the beach here; but where he will land is another affair; and the troops are as likely to be wanted twenty miles down the coast, or twenty miles up, as

anywhere else. I wish you would give me a general order for the dragoons to assist me wherever I may want them."

"That is given already, Mr. Mowle," answered the officer; "such are the commands we have received; and even the non-commissioned officers are instructed, on the very first requisition made by a chief officer of Customs, to turn out and aid in the execution of the law. Wherever any of the regiment are quartered, you will find them ready to assist."

"Ay, but they are so scattered, Sir," rejoined Mowle, "that it may be difficult to get them together in a hurry."

"Not in the least," replied Osborn; "they are so disposed that I can, at a very short notice, collect a sufficient force, at any point, to deal with the largest body of smugglers that ever assembled."

"You may, perhaps, Sir, but I cannot," answered the Custom-House officer; "and what I wish is, that you would give them a general order to march to any place where I require them, and to act as I shall direct."

"Nay, Mr. Mowle," said the other, shaking his head, "that, I am afraid, cannot be. I have no instructions to such effect; and though the military power is sent here, to assist the civil, it is not put under the command of the civil. I do not conceal from you that I do not like the service; but that shall only be a motive with me for executing my duty the more vigorously; and you have but to give me intimation of where you wish a force collected, and it shall be done in the shortest possible time."

Mowle did not seem quite satisfied with this answer; and after musing for a few minutes, he replied, "But suppose I do not know myself — suppose it should be fifteen or twenty miles from Hythe, and I myself, on the spot, how am I to get the requisition sent to you — and how are you to move your men to the place where I may want them — perhaps, farther still?"

"As to my moving my men, you must leave that to me," answered the young officer; "and as to your obtaining the information, and communicating it, I might reply, that *you* must look to that; but as I sincerely believe you to be a most vigilant and active person, who will leave no means unemployed to obtain in-

telligence, I will only point out, in the first place, that our best efforts sometimes fail, but that we may always rest at ease, when we have used our best; and, in the second, I will suggest to you one or two means of ensuring success. Wherever you may happen to find that the landing of these goods is intended, or wherever you may be when it is effected, you will find within a circle of three miles, several parties of dragoons, who, on the first call, will render you every aid. With them, upon the system I have laid down for them, you will be able to keep your adversaries in check, delay their operations, and follow them up. Your first step, however, should be, to send off a trooper to me with all speed, charging him, if verbally, with as short and plain a message as possible — first, stating the point where the ‘run,’ as you call it, has been effected; and secondly, in what direction, to the best of your judgment, the enemy — that is to say, the smugglers — are marching. If you do that, and are right in your conjecture, they shall not go far without being attacked. If you are wrong, as any man may be, in regard to their line of retreat, they shall not be long unpursued. But as to putting the military under the command of the Customs, as I said before, I have no orders to that effect, and do not think that any such will ever be issued. In the next place, in order to obtain the most speedy information yourself, and to ensure that I shall be prepared, I would suggest that you direct each officer on the coast, if a landing should be effected in his district, first, to call for the aid of the nearest military party, and then to light a beacon on the next high ground. As soon as the first beacon is lighted, let the next officer on the side of Hythe, light one also, and, at the same time, with any force he can collect, proceed towards the first. Easy means may be found to transmit intelligence of the route of the smugglers to the bodies coming up; and, in a case like the present, I shall not scruple to take the command myself, at any point where I may be assured formidable resistance is likely to be offered.”

“Well, Sir, I think the plan of the beacons is a good one,” answered Mowle, “and it would be still better, if there were any of the coast officers on whom we could depend; but a more rascally

set of mercenary knaves does not exist. Not one of them who would not sell the whole of the King's revenue for a twenty pound or so; and, however clear are the orders they receive, they find means to mistake them. But I will go and write the whole down, and have it copied out for each station, so that if they do not choose to understand, it must be their own fault. I am afraid, however, that all this preparation will put our friends upon their guard, and that they will delay their run till they can draw us off somewhere else."

"There is some reason for that apprehension," replied the young officer, thoughtfully. "You imagine, then, that it is likely to take place to-morrow night, if we keep quiet?"

"I have little doubt of it," replied Mowle; "or if not, the night after. — But I think it will be to-morrow. Yes, they won't lose the opportunity, if they fancy we are slack; and then the superintendent chose to fall sick to-day, so that the whole rests with me, which will give me enough to do, as they are well aware."

"Well, then," replied the gentleman to whom he spoke, "leave the business of the beacons to me. I will give orders that they be lighted at every post, as soon as application is made for assistance. You will know what it means when you see one; and, in the meantime, keep quite quiet — affect a certain degree of indifference, but not too much, and speak of having partly spoiled Mr. Radford's venture. — Do you think he will be present himself?"

"Oh, not he — not he!" answered Mowle. "He is too cunning for that, by a hundred miles. In any little affair like this of to-day, he might not, perhaps, be afraid of showing himself — to answer a purpose; but in a more serious piece of business, where his brother justices could not contrive to shelter him, and where government would certainly interfere, he will keep as quiet and still as if he had nought to do with it. But I will have him, nevertheless, before long; and then all his ill-gotten wealth shall go, even if we do not contrive to transport him."

"How will you manage that?" asked the young officer; "if he abstains from taking any active part, you will have no proof,

unless, indeed, one of those he employs should give evidence against him, or inform beforehand for the sake of the reward."

"They won't do that," said Mowle, thoughtfully, "they won't do that. — I do not know how it is, Sir," he continued, after a moment's pause, "but the difference between the establishment of the Customs and the smugglers is a very strange one; and I'll tell you what it is: there is not one of these fellows who run goods upon the coast, or carry them inland, who will, for any sum that can be offered, inform against their employers or their comrades; and there's scarce a Custom-House officer in all Kent, that, for five shillings, would not betray his brother or sell his country. The riding officers are somewhat better than the rest; but these fellows at the ports think no more of taking a bribe to shut their eyes than of drinking a glass of rum. Now you may attempt to bribe a smuggler for ever — not that I ever tried; for I don't like to ask men to sell their own souls; but Birchett has, often. I cannot well make out the cause of this difference; but certainly there is such a spirit amongst the smugglers that they won't do a dishonest thing, except in their own way, for any sum. There are the Ramleys, even — the greatest blackguards in Europe, smugglers, thieves, and cut-throats — but they won't betray each other. There is no crime they won't commit but that; and that they would sooner die than do; while we have a great many men amongst us, come of respectable parents, well brought up, well educated, who take money every day to cheat their employers."

"I rather suspect that it is the difference of consequences in the two cases," answered Osborn, "which makes men view the same act in a different way. A Custom-House officer who betrays his trust, thinks that he only brings a little loss upon a government which can well spare it — he is not a bit the less a rogue for that, for honesty makes no such distinctions — but the smuggler who betrays his comrade or employer, must be well aware that he is not only ruining him in purse, but bringing on him corporeal punishment."

"Ay, Sir, but there's a spirit in the thing," said Mowle, shaking his head; "the very country people in general love the smugglers, and help them whenever they can. There's not a cot-

tage that will not hide them or their goods; scarce a gentleman in the county who, if he finds all the horses out of his stable in the morning, does not take it quietly, without asking any more questions; scarce a magistrate who does not give the fellows notice as soon as he knows the officers are after them. The country folks, indeed, do not like them so well as they did; but they 'll soon make it up."

"A strange state, certainly," said the officer of Dragoons; "but what has become of the horses you mention, when they are thus found absent?"

"Gone to carry goods, to be sure," answered Mowle. "But one thing is very clear, all the country is in the smugglers' favour, and I cannot help thinking that the people do not like the Custom's dues, that they don't see the good of them, and are resolved to put them down."

"Ignorant people, and, indeed, all people, do not like taxation of any kind," replied Osborn; "and every class objects to that tax which presses on itself, without the slightest regard either for the necessity of distributing the burdens of the country equally, or any of the apparently minute but really important considerations upon which the apportionment has been formed. However, Mr. Mowle, we have only to do our duty according to our position — you to gain all the information that you can — I to aid you, to the best of my ability, in carrying the law into effect."

"From the smugglers themselves, little is the information I can get, Sir," answered Mowle, returning to the subject from which their conversation had deviated, "and often I am obliged to have recourse to means I am ashamed of. The principal intelligence I receive is from a boy who offered himself one day — the little devil's imp — and certainly, by his cunning, and by not much caring myself what risks I run, I have got some very valuable tidings. But the little vagabond would betray me, or any one else, to-morrow. He is the grandson of an old hag who lives at a little hut just by Saltwood, who puts him up to it all; and if ever there was an old demon in the world she is one. She is always brewing mischief, and chuckling over it all the time, as if it were her sport to see men tear each other to pieces, and to make innocent girls as

bad as she was herself, and as her own daughter was, too, — the mother of this boy. The girl was killed by a chance shot, one day, in a riot between the smugglers and the Customs people; and the old woman always says it was a smuggler's shot. Oh! I could tell you such stories of that old witch."

The stories of Mr. Mowle, however, were cut short by the entrance of a servant carrying a letter, which the young officer took and opened with a look of eager anxiety. The contents were brief; but they seemed important, for various were the changes which came over his fine countenance while he read them. The predominant expression, however, was joy, though there was a look of thoughtful consideration — perhaps in a degree of embarrassment, too, on his face; and as he laid the letter down on the table, and beat the paper with his fingers, gazing up into vacancy, Mowle, judging that his presence was not desired, rose to retire.

"Stay a moment, Mr. Mowle — stay a moment," said Osborn. "This letter requires some consideration. It contains a call to a part of Kent some fifteen or sixteen miles distant; but as it is upon private business, I must not let that interfere with my public duty. You say that this enterprise of Mr. Radford's is likely to be put in execution to-morrow night."

"I cannot be sure, Colonel," answered the officer; "but I think there is every chance of it."

"Then I must return before nightfall to-morrow," replied the gentleman, with a sigh.

"Your presence will be very necessary, Sir," said the Custom-House officer. "There is not one of your officers who seems up to the business, except Major Digby and yourself. All the rest are such fine gentlemen that one can't get on with them."

"Let me consider for a moment," rejoined the other; but Mowle went on in the same strain, saying, "Then, Sir, if you were to be absent all to-morrow, I might get very important information, and not be able to give it to you, nor arrange anything with you either."

Osborn still meditated with a grave brow for some time. "I will write," he said, at length. "It will be better — it will be only just and honourable. I will write instead of going to-morrow,

Mr. Mowle; and if this affair should not take place to-morrow night, as you suppose, I will make such arrangements for the following day — on which I must go over to Woodchurch — as will enable you to communicate with me without delay, should you have any message to send. At all events, I will return to Hythe before night. Now good evening;" and while Mowle made his bow and retired, the young officer turned to the letter again, and read it over with glistening eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

I WONDER if the reader ever wandered from Saltwood Castle back to the good old town of Hythe, on a fine summer's day, with a fair companion, as full of thought and mind as grace and beauty, and with a dear child just at the age when all the world is fresh and lovely — and then missed his way, and strayed — far from the track — towards Sandgate, till dinner was kept waiting at the inn, and the party who would not plod on foot, were all tired and wondering at their friend's delay! — I wonder if the reader ever did all this. I have — and a very pleasant thing it is to do. Yes, all of it, reader. For, surely, to go from waving wood to green field, and from green field to hill-side and wood again, and to trace along the brook which we know must lead to the sea-shore, with one companion of high soul, who can answer thought for thought, and another in life's early morning, who can bring back before your eyes the picture of young enjoyment — ay, and to know that those you love most dearly and esteem most highly, are looking for your coming, with a little anxiety, not even approaching the bounds of apprehension, is all very pleasant indeed.

You, dear and excellent lady, who were one of my companions on the way, may perhaps recollect a little cottage — near the spot where we sprung a solitary partridge — whither I went to inquire the shortest road to Hythe. That cottage was standing there at the period of which I now write; and at the bottom of that hill, amongst the wood, and close by the little stream nearly where the foot-bridge now carries the traveller over dryshod, was another

hut, half concealed by the trees, and covered over with well nigh as much moss and houseleek as actual thatch.

It has been long swept away, as well as its tenants; and certainly a wretched and ill-constructed place it was. Would to Heaven that all such were gone from our rich and productive land, and that every labourer, in a country which owes so much to the industry of her children, had a dwelling better fitted to a human being! But, alas, many such still exist! and it is not always, as it was in this case, that vice is the companion of misery. This is no book of idle twaddle, to represent all the wealthy as cold, hard, and vicious, and the poor all good, forbearing, and laborious; for evil is pretty equally distributed through all classes — though, God knows, the rich, with all their opportunities, ought to show a smaller proportion of wickedness, and the poor might perhaps be expected, from their temptations, to be worse than they are! Still it is hard to think that many as honest a man as ever lived — ay, and as industrious a man, too — returns, after his hard day's toil, to find his wife and children, well nigh in starvation, in such a place as I am about to describe — and none to help them.

The hut — for it did not deserve the name of cottage — was but of one floor, which was formed of beaten clay, but a little elevated above the surrounding soil. It contained two rooms. The one opened into what had been a garden before it, running down nearly to the brook-side; and the other communicated with the first, but had a door which gave exit into the wood behind. Windows the hut had two, one on either side; but neither contained more than two complete panes of glass. The spaces, where glass had once been, were now filled up in a strange variety of ways. Here was a piece of board nailed in; there a coarse piece of cloth kept out the wind; another broken pane was filled up with paper; and another, where some fragments of the original substance remained, was stopped with an old stocking stuffed with straw. In the garden, as it was still called, appeared a few cabbages and onions, with more cabbage-stalks than either, and a small patch of miserable potatoes. But weeds were the most plentiful of all, and chickweed and groundsel enough appeared there to have sup-

plied a whole forest of singing birds. It had been once fenced in, that miserable garden; but the wood had been pulled down and burned for firing by its present tenants, or others as wretched in circumstances as themselves; and nought remained but a strong post here and there, with sometimes a many-coloured rag of coarse cotton fluttering upon some long, rusty nail, which had snatched a shred from passing poverty. Three or four stunted gooseberry bushes, however, marked out the limit on one side; a path ran in front between the garden and the brook; and on the other side there was a constant petty warfare between the farmer and the inhabitant of the hovel as to the possession of the borderland; and like a great and small state contending, the more powerful always gained some advantage in despite of right, but lost perhaps as much by the spiteful incursions of the foe, as if he had yielded the contested territory.

On the night of which I speak — the same on which Mowle visited the commanding officer of the Dragoons at Hythe — the cottage itself, the garden, and all the squalid-looking things about the place, were hidden in the deep darkness which had again fallen over the earth as soon as night had fallen. The morning, it may be remembered — it was the same on which Sir Edward Digby had been fired at by the smugglers — had been somewhat cold and foggy; but about eleven, the day had brightened, and the evening had been sultry. No sooner, however, did the sun reach the horizon than mists began to rise, and before seven o'clock the whole sky was under cloud and the air filled with fog. He must have been well acquainted with every step of the country who could find his way from town to town. Nevertheless, any one who approached Galley Ray's cottage, as it was called, would, at the distance of at least a hundred yards, have perceived something to lead him on; for a light, red as that of a baleful meteor, was streaming through the two glazed squares of the window into the misty air, making them look like the eyes of some wild animal in a dark forest.

We must pause here, however, for a moment, to explain to the reader who Galley Ray was, and how she acquired the first of her two appellations, which certainly was not that which she had

received at her baptism. Galley Ray, then, was the old woman of whom Mr. Mowle had given that favourable account, which may be seen in the last chapter; and, to say the truth, he had but done her justice. Her name was originally Gillian Ray; but, amongst a number of corrupt associates, with whom her early life was spent, the first of the two appellations was speedily transformed to Gilly or Gill. Some time afterwards — when youth began to wane, and whatever youthful graces she possessed were deviating into the virago qualities of the middle age — while watching one night the approach of a party of smugglers, with whom she had some intimacy, she perceived three or four Custom-House officers coming down to launch a galley, which they had upon the beach, for the purpose of cutting off the free-traders. But Gilly Ray instantly sprang in, and with the boat-hook set them all at defiance, till they threatened to launch her into the sea, boat and all.

It is true, she was reported to have been drunk at the time; but her daring saved the smugglers, and conveyed her for two months to jail, whence, as may be supposed, she returned not much improved in her morals. One of those whom she had befriended in the time of need, bestowed on her the name of Galley, by an easy transition from her original prænomen; and it remained by her to the last day of her life.

The reader has doubtless remarked, that amongst the lawless and the rash, there is a certain fondness for figures of speech, and that tropes and metaphors, simile and synecdoche, are far more prevalent amongst them than amongst the more orderly classes of society. Whether it is or not, that they wish to get rid of a precise apprehension of their own acts, I cannot say; but certain it is, that they do indulge in such flowers of rhetoric, and sometimes, in the midst of humour, quaintness, and even absurdity, reach the point of wit, and at times soar into the sublime. Galley Ray had, as we have seen, one daughter, whose fate has been related; and that daughter left one son, who, after his reputed father, one Mark Nightingale, was baptized Nightingale Ray. His mother, and after her death his grandmother, used to call him Little Nighty and Little Night; but following their

fanciful habits, the smugglers who used to frequent the house found out an association between "Night Ray" and the beams of the bright and mystical orbs that shine upon us from afar; and some one gave him the name of Little Starlight, which remained with him, as that of Galley had adhered to his grandmother.

The cottage or hut of the latter, then, beamed with an unwonted blaze upon the night I have spoken of, till long after the hour when Mowle had left the inn where his conference with the young officer had taken place. But let not the reader suppose that this illumination proceeded from any great expense of wax or oil. Only one small tallow candle, stuck into a long-necked, square-sided Dutch bottle, spread its rays through the interior of the hovel, and that was a luxury; but in the fire-place blazed an immense pile of mingled wood and driftcoal; and over it hung a large hissing pot, as huge and capacious as that of the witches in *Macbeth*, or of the no less famous Meg Merrilies. Galley Ray, however, was a very different person in appearance from the heroine of "Guy Mannering;" and we must endeavour to call up her image as she stood by the fire-side, watching the cauldron and a kettle which stood close to it.

The red and fitful light flashed upon no tall, gaunt form, and lighted up no wild and commanding features. There was nothing at all poetical in her aspect: it was such as may be seen every day in the haunts of misery and vice. Originally of the middle height, though once strong and upright, she had somewhat sunk down under the hand of Time, and was now rather short than otherwise. About fifty she had grown fat and heavy; but fifteen years more had robbed her flesh of firmness and her skin of its plumped out smoothness; and though she had not yet reached the period when emaciation accompanies decrepitude, her muscles were loose and hanging, her face withered and sallow. Her hair, once as black as jet, was now quite grey, not silver — but with the white greatly predominating over the black. Yet, strange to say, her eyes were still clear and bright, though small, and somewhat red round the lids; and, stranger still, her front teeth were white as ivory, offering a strange contrast to the wrinkled and yellow skin. Her look was keen; but there was that sort of habitual jocular

about it, which in people of her caste is often partly assumed — as an ever ready excuse for evading a close question, or covering a dangerous suggestion by a jest — and partly natural, or at least springing from a fearful kind of philosophy, gained by the exhaustion of all sorts of criminal pleasures, which leaves behind, too surely, the impression that everything is but a mockery on earth. Those who have adopted that philosophy never give a thought beyond this world. Her figure was somewhat bowed, and over her shoulders she had the fragments of a coarse woollen shawl, from beneath which appeared, as she stirred the pot, her sharp yellow elbows and long arms. On her head she wore a cap, which had remained there, night and day, for months; and, thrust back from her forehead, which was low and heavy, appeared the dishevelled grey hair, while beneath the thick and beetling brows came the keen eyes, and a nose somewhat aquiline and depressed at the point.

Near her, on the opposite side of the hearth, was the boy whom the reader has already seen, and who has been called little Starlight; and, even at that late hour, for it was near midnight, he seemed as brisk and active as ever. Night and day, indeed, appeared to him the same; for he had none of the habits of childhood. The setting sun brought no drowsiness to his eyelids: mid-day often found him sleeping after a night of watchfulness and activity. The whole course of his existence and his thoughts had been tainted: there was nothing of youth either in his mind or his ways. The old beldam called him, and thought him, the shrewdest boy that ever lived; but, in truth, she had left him no longer a boy, in aught but size and looks. Often — indeed generally — he would assume the tone of his years, for he found it served his purpose best; but he only laughed at those who thought him a child, and prided himself on the cunning of the artifice.

There might be, it is true, some lingering of the faults of youth, but that was all. He was greedy and voracious, loved sweet things as well as strong drink, and could not always curb the truant and erratic spirit of childhood; but still, even in his wanderings there was a purpose, and often a malevolence. He would go to see what one person was about; he would stay away because another wanted him. It may be asked, was this natural

wickedness? — was his heart so formed originally? Oh no, reader; never believe such things. There are certainly infinite varieties of human character; and I admit that the mind of man is not the blank sheet of paper on which we can write what we please, as has been vainly represented. Or, if it be, the experience of every man must have shown him, that that paper is of every different kind and quality — some that will retain the finest line, some that will scarce receive the broadest trace. But still education has immense power for good or evil. By education I do not mean teaching. I mean that great and wonderful process by which, commencing at the earliest period of infancy — ay, at the mother's breast — the raw material of the mind is manufactured into all the varieties that we see. I mean the sum of every line with which the paper is written as it passes from hand to hand. That is education; and most careful should we be that, at an early period, nought should be written but good, for every word once impressed is well nigh indelible.

Now what education had that poor boy received? The people of the neighbouring village would have said a very good one; for there was what is called a charity school in the neighbourhood, where he had been taught to read and write, and cast accounts. But this was *teaching*, not *education*. Oh, fatal mistake! when will Englishmen learn to discriminate between the two? His education had been at home — in that miserable hut — by that wretched woman — by her companions in vice and crime! What had all the *teaching* he had received at the school done for him, but placed weapons in the hand of wickedness? Had education formed any part of the system of the school where he was instructed — had he been taught how best to use the gifts that were imparted — had he been inured to regulate the mind that was stored — had he been habituated to draw just conclusions from all he read, instead of merely being taught to read, that would have been in some degree education, and it might have corrected, to a certain point, the darker schooling he received at home. Well might the great philosopher, who in some things most grossly misused the knowledge he himself possessed, pronounce that “Knowledge is power;” but, alas, he forgot to add, that it is

power *for good or evil!* That poor child had been taught that which to him might have been either a blessing or a bane; but all his real education had been for evil; and there he stood, corrupted to the heart's core.

"I say, Mother Ray," he exclaimed, "that smells cursed nice — can't you give us a drop before the coves come?"

"No, no, you young devil," replied the old woman with a grin, "one can't tell when they'll show their mugs at the door; and it wouldn't do for them to find you gobbling up their stuff. But bring me that big porringer, and we'll put by enough for you and me. I've nipped one half of the yellow-boy they sent, so we'll have a quart of moonshine to-morrow to help it down."

"I could get it very well down without," answered little Starlight, bringing her a large earthen pot, with a cracked cover, into which she ladled out about half a gallon of the soup.

"There, take and put that far under the bed in t'other room," said the old woman, adding several expletives of so peculiar and unpleasant a character, that I must omit them; and, indeed, trusting to the reader's imagination, I shall beg leave to soften, as far as possible, the terms of both the boy and his grandmother for the future, merely premising, that when conversing alone together, hardly a sentence escaped their lips without an oath or a blasphemy.

Little Starlight soon received the pot from the hands of his worthy ancestress, and conveyed it into the other room, where he stayed so long that she called him to come forth, in what, to ordinary ears, would have seemed the most abusive language, but which, on her lips, was merely the tone of endearment. He had waited, indeed, to cool the soup, in order to steal a portion of the stolen food; but finding that he should be detected if he remained longer, he ventured to put his finger in to taste it. The result was that he scalded his hand; but he was sufficiently Spartan to utter no cry or indication of pain; and he escaped all inquiry; for the moment after he had returned, the door burst violently open, and some ten or twelve men came pouring in, nearly filling the little room.

Various were their garbs, and strangely different from each

other were they in demeanour as well as dress. Some were clad in smock-frocks, and some in sailors' jackets; some looked like respectable tradesmen, some were clothed in a sort of fanciful costume of their own, smacking a little of the brigand; and one appeared in the ordinary riding-dress of a gentleman of that period; but all were well armed, without much concealment of the pistols, which they carried about them in addition to the sword that was not uncommonly borne by more than one class in England at that time. They were all young men except one or two; and three of the number bore evident marks of some recent affray. One had a broad strip of plaster all the way down his forehead, another had his upper lip terribly cut, and a third — the gentleman, as I am bound to call him, as he assumed the title of Major — had a patch over his eye, from beneath which appeared several rings of various colours, which showed that the aforesaid patch was not merely a means of disguise.

They were all quite familiar with Galley Ray and her grandson; some slapped her on the shoulder; some pulled her ear; some abused her horribly in jocular tones; and all called upon her eagerly to set their supper before them, vowing that they had come twenty miles since seven o'clock that night, and were as hungry as fox-hunters.

To each and all Galley Ray had something to say in their own particular way. To some she was civil and coaxing, addressed them as "gentlemen," and to others slang and abusive, though quite in good humour, calling them, "you blackguards," and "you varmint," with sundry other delectable epithets, which I shall forbear to transcribe.

To give value to her entertainment, she of course started every objection and difficulty in the world against receiving them, asking how, in the name of the fiend, they could expect her to take in so many? where she was to get porringers or plates for them all? and hoping heartily that such a troop weren't going to stay above half an hour.

"Till to-morrow night, Galley, my chicken," replied the Major. "Come, don't make a fuss. It must be so, and you shall be well paid. We shall stay in here to-night; and to-morrow

we shall take to cover in the wood; but young Radford will come down some time in the day, and then you must send up little Starlight to us, to let me know."

The matter of the supper was soon arranged to their contentment. Some had tea-cups, and some saucers; some had earthen pans, some wooden platters. Two were honoured with china plates; and the large pot being taken off the fire, and set on the ground in the midst of them, each helped himself, and went on with his meal. A grand brewing of smuggled spirits and water then commenced; and a number of horn cups were handed round, not enough, indeed, for all the guests; but each vessel was made to serve two or three; and the first silence of hunger being over, a wild, rambling, and desultory conversation ensued, to which both Galley Ray and her grandson lent an attentive ear.

The Major said something to the man with the cut upon his brow, to which the other replied, by condemning his own soul, if he did not blow Harding's brains out — if it were true. "But, I don't believe it," he continued. "He's no friend of mine; but he's not such a blackguard as to peach."

"So I think; but Dick Radford says he is sure he did," answered the Major; "Dick fancies that he's jealous of not having had yesterday's job too, and that's why he spoiled it. We know he was up about that part of the country on the pretence of his seeing his Dolly; but Radford says he went to inform, and that he'll wring his liver out, as soon as this job of his father's is over."

A torrent of blasphemies poured forth by almost every person present followed, and they all called down the most horrid condemnation on their own heads, if they did not each lend a hand to punish the informer. In the midst of this storm of big words, Galley Ray put her mouth to the Major's ear, saying, "I could tell young Radford how he could wring his heart out, and that's better than his liver. There's no use of trying to kill him, for he doesn't care two straws about that. Sharp steel and round lead are what he looks for every day. But I could show you how to plague him worse."

"Why, you old brute," replied the Major, "you're a friend

of his! — But you may tell him, if you like. We have all sworn it, and we 'll do it; only hold your tongue till after to-morrow night, or I 'll cure your bacon for you."

"I 'm no friend of his," cried Galley Ray. "The infernal devil, wasn't it he that shot my girl, Meg? Ay, ay, I know he says he didn't, and that he didn't fire a pistol that day, but kept all to the cutlash; but he did, I 'm sure, and a-purpose too; for didn't he turn to, that morning, and abuse her like the very dirt under his feet, because she came, a little in liquor, down to his boat-side? — Ay, I 'll have my revenge — I 've been looking for it long, but now it 's a-coming — it 's a-coming very fast; and afore I 've done with him, I 'll wring him out like a wet cloth, till he 's not got one pleasure left in his whole carcase, nor one thing to look to, for as long as he may live! — Ay, ay, he thinks an old woman nothing; but he shall see — he shall see;" and the beldam wagged her frightful head backwards and forwards with a look of well-contented malice that made it more horrible than ever.

"What an old devil!" cried the Major, glancing round the table with a look of mock surprise; and then they all burst into a roar of laughter which shook the miserable hovel in which they sat.

"Come, Granny, give us some more lush, and leave off preaching," cried Ned Ramley, the man with the cut upon his brow. "You can tell it all to Dick Radford, to-morrow; for he 's fond of cutting up people's hearts."

"But how is it — how is it?" asked the Major. "I should like to hear."

"Ay, but you shan't hear all," answered Galley Ray. "Let Dick do his part, and I 'll do mine, so we 'll both have our revenge; but I know one thing, if I were a gentleman, and wanted a twist at Jack Harding, I 'd get his Kate away from him. She 's a light-hearted lass, and would listen to a gentleman, I dare say; but, however, I 'll have her away some way, and then kick her out into Folkestone streets, to get her bread like many a better woman than herself."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said Ned Ramley — "that 's all stuff."

Harding is going to marry her; and she knows better than to play the fool."

"Ay," answered the old woman, with a look of spite, "I shouldn't wonder if Harding spoiled this job for old Radford, too."

"Not he!" cried Ramley, "he would pinch himself there, old tiger; for his own pay depends upon it."

"Ay, upon landing the stuff safely," answered the old woman, with a grin, "but not upon getting it clear up into the Weald. He may have both, Neddy, my dear — he may have both pays; first for landing and then for peaching. Play booty for ever! — that's the way to make money; and who knows but you may get another crack of your own pretty skull, or have your brains sent flying out, like the inside of an egg against the pillory."

"By the fiend, he had better not," said Ned Ramley, "for there will be some of us left, at all events, to pay him."

"Come, speak out, old woman," cried another of the men; "have you or your imp there got any inkling that the Custom-House blackguards have nosed the job. If we find they have, and you don't tell, I'll send you into as much thick loam as will cover you well, I can tell you;" and he added a horrible oath to give force to his words.

"Not they, as yet," answered the beldam, "of that I am quite sure; for as soon as the guinea and the message came, I went down to buy the beef, and mutton, and the onions; and there I saw Mowle talking to Gurney the grocer, and heard him say that he had spoiled Mr. Radford's venture this morning, for one turn at least; and after that, I sent down little Nighty there, to watch him and his cronies; and they all seemed very jolly, he said, when he came back half an hour ago, and crowing like so many young cocks, as if they had done a mighty deal. Didn't they, my dear?"

"Ay, that they did, Granny," replied the boy, with a look of simplicity; "and when I went to the tap of the Dragon to get twopennorth, I heard the landlord say that Mowle was up with the dragoon Colonel, telling him all about the fine morning's work they had made."

“Devilish fine, indeed!” cried Ned Ramley. “Why they did not get one quarter of the things; and if we can save a third, that’s enough to pay very well, I can tell them.”

“No, no! they know nothing as yet,” continued the old woman, with a sapient shake of the head; “I can’t say what they may hear before to-morrow night; but, if they do hear anything, I know where it will come from — that’s all. People may be blind if they like; but I’m not, that’s one thing.”

“No, no! you see sharp enough, Galley Ray,” answered the Major. “But hark, is not that the sound of a horse coming down?”

All the men started up; and some one exclaimed, “I shouldn’t wonder if it were Mowle himself. — He’s always spying about.”

“If it is, I’ll blow his brains out,” said Ned Ramley, motioning to the rest to make their way into the room behind.

“Ay, you had best, I think, Neddy,” said Galley Ray, in a quiet, considerate tone, answering his rash threat as coolly as if she had been speaking of the catching of a trout. “You’ll have him here all snug, and may never get such another chance. ‘Dead men tell no tales,’ Neddy. But, get back — ’t is a horse, sure enough! You can take your own time, if you go in there.”

The young man retreated; and bending down her lips to the boy’s ear, the old witch inquired in a whisper, “Is t’other door locked, and the window fast?”

“Yes,” said the boy, in the same tone; “and the key hid in the sacking.”

“Then if there are enough to take ’em,” murmured Gally Ray to herself — “take ’em they shall! — If there’s no one but Mowle, he must go — that’s clear. Stretch out that bit o’ sail, boy, to catch the blood.”

But before the boy could obey her whisper, the door of the hut was thrown open; and instead of Mowle there appeared the figure of Richard Radford.

“Here, little Starlight!” he cried, “hold my horse — why, where are all the men? Have they not come?”

The old woman arranged her face in an instant into the sweetest smile it was capable of assuming, and replied, instantly, “Oh

dear, yes: bless your beautiful face, Mr. Radford, but we didn't expect you to-night, and thought it was some of the Custom-House blackguards when we heard the horse. Here, Neddy! — Major! — It's only Mr. Radford."

Ere she had uttered the call, the men, hearing a well-known voice, were entering the room again; and young Radford shook hands with several of them familiarly, congratulating the late prisoners on their escape.

"I found I couldn't come to-morrow morning," he said, "and so I rode down to-night. It's all settled for to-morrow, and by this time Harding's at sea. He'll keep over on the other side till the sun is low; and we must be ready for work by ten, though I don't think he'll get close in before midnight."

"Are you quite sure of Harding, Mr. Radford?" asked the Major. "I thought you had doubts of him about this other venture."

"Ay, and so I have still," answered Richard Radford, a dark scowl coming over his face, "but we must get this job over first. My father says, he will have no words about it, till this is all clear, and after that I may do as I like. Then, Major, then —"

He did not finish the sentence; but those who heard him knew very well what he meant; and the Major inquired, "But is he quite safe in this business? The old woman thinks not."

Young Radford mused with a heavy brow for a minute or two, and then replied, after a sudden start, "But it's no use now — he's at sea by this time; and we can't mend it. Have you heard anything certain of him, Galley Ray?"

"No, nothing quite for certain, my beauty," said the old woman; "but one thing I know: he was seen there upon the cliffs, with two strange men, a-talking away at a great rate; and that was the very night he saw your father, too; but that dear little cunning devil, my boy, Nighty — he's the shrewdest lad that ever lived — found it all out."

"What did he find out?" demanded young Radford, sharply.

"Why, who the one was, he could never be sure," answered the beldam — "a nasty-looking ugly brute, all tattooed in the

face, like a wild Indian ; but the other was the Colonel of Dragoons that 's certain, so Nighty says — he is the shrewdest boy that — ”

Richard Radford and his companions gazed at each other with very meaning and very ill-satisfied looks ; but the former, at length, said, “ Well, we shall see — we shall see ! and if he does, he shall rue it. In the meantime, Major, what we must do is, to have force enough to set them, dragoons and all, at defiance. My father has got already a hundred men, and I 'll beat up for more to-morrow. — I can get fifty or sixty out of Sussex. We 'll all be down with you early. The soldiers are scattered about in little parties, so they can never have very many together ; and the devil 's in it, if we can't beat a handful of them.”

“ Give us a hundred men,” said Ned Ramley, “ and we 'll beat the whole regiment of them.”

“ Why, there are not to be found twenty of them together in any one place,” answered young Radford, “ except at Folkestone, and we shan't have the run within fifteen or sixteen miles of that ; so we shall easily do for them ; and I should like to give those rascals a licking.”

“ Then, what 's to be done with Harding ? ” asked Ned Ramley.

“ Leave him to me — leave him to me, Ned,” replied the young gentleman, “ I 'll find a way of settling accounts with him.”

“ Why, the old woman was talking something about it,” said the Major. “ Come, speak up, old brute ! — What is it you 've got to say ? ”

“ Oh, I 'll tell him quietly when he 's a going,” answered Galley Ray. “ It 's no business of yours, Major.”

“ She hates him like poison,” said the Major, in a whisper, to young Radford ; “ so that you must not believe all she says about him.”

The young man gave a gloomy smile, and then, after a few words more, unceremoniously turned the old woman out of her own hovel, telling her he would come and speak to her in a moment. As soon as the hut was clear of her presence, he proceeded to make all his final arrangements with the lawless set who were gathered together within.

"I thought that Harding was not to set off till to-morrow morning," said one of the more staid-looking of the party, at length; "I wonder your father lets him make such changes, Mr. Radford — it looks suspicious, to my thinking."

"No, no; it was by my father's own orders," said young Radford; "there's nothing wrong in that. I saw the note sent this evening; so that's all right. By some contrivance of his own, Harding is to give notice to one of the people on Tolsford Hill, when he is well in land and all is safe; and then we shall see a fire lighted on the top, which is to be our signal, to gather down on the beach. It's all right in that respect, at least."

"I'm glad to hear it," answered the other; "and now, as all is settled, had you not better take a glass of grog before you go."

"No, no," replied the young man, "I'll keep my head cool for to-morrow; for I've got a job to do in the morning that may want a clear eye and a steady hand."

"Well, then, good luck to you!" said Ned Ramley, laughing; and with this benediction, the young gentleman opened the cottage door.

He found Galley Ray holding his horse alone; and, as soon as she saw him, she said, "I've sent the boy away, Mr. Radford, because I wanted to have a chat with you for a minute, all alone, about that blackguard, Harding;" and sinking her voice to a whisper, she proceeded for several minutes, detailing her own diabolical notions, of how young Radford might best revenge himself on Harding, with a coaxing manner, and sweet tone, which contrasted strangely and horribly, both with the words which she occasionally used, and the general course of her suggestions. Young Radford sometimes laughed, with a harsh sort of bitter, unpleasant merriment, and sometimes asked questions, but more frequently remained listening attentively to what she said.

Thus passed some ten minutes, at the end of which time, he exclaimed, with an oath, "I'll do it!" and then, mounting his horse, he rode away slowly and cautiously, on account of the thick fog and the narrow and stony road.

No sooner was he gone, than little Starlight crept out from between the cottage and a pile of dried furze-bushes, which had

been cast down on the left of the hut — at once affording fuel to the inhabitants, and keeping out the wind from a large crack in the wall, which penetrated through and through, into the room where young Radford had been conversing with the smugglers.

“Did you hear them, my kiddy?” asked the old woman, as soon as the boy approached her.

“Every word, Mother Ray,” answered little Starlight. “But, get in, get in, or they will be thinking something; and I’ll tell you all to-morrow.”

The old woman saw the propriety of his suggestion; and, both entering the hovel, the door was shut. With it, I may close a scene, upon which I have been obliged to pause longer than I could have wished.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE man who follows a wolf goes straight on after him till he rides him down; but, in chasing a fox, it is always expedient and fair to take across the easiest country for your horse or for yourself, to angle a field, to make for a slope when the neighbouring bank is too high, to avoid a clay fallow, or to skirt a shaking moss. Very frequently, however, one beholds an inexperienced sportsman (who does not well know the country he is riding, and sees the field broken up into several parties, each taking its own course after the hounds) pause for several minutes, not knowing which to follow. Such is often the case with the romance writer also, when the broken nature of the country over which his course lies, separates his characters, and he cannot proceed with all of them at once.

Now, at the present moment, I would fain follow the smugglers to the end of their adventure; but, in so doing, dear reader, I should (to borrow a shred of the figure I have just used) get before my hounds; or, in other words, I should too greatly violate that strict chronological order which is necessary in an important history like the present. I must, therefore, return, by the reader’s good leave, to the house of Mr. Zachary Croyland, almost immediately after Sir Edward Digby had ridden away, on the day

following young Radford's recently related interview with the smugglers, at which day — with a sad violation of the chronological order I have mentioned above — I had already arrived, as the reader must remember, in the fourteenth chapter.

Mr. Croyland then stood in the little drawing-room, fitted up according to his own peculiar notions, where Sir Edward's wound had been dressed; and Edith, his niece, sat at no great distance on one of the low ottomans, for which he had an oriental predilection. She was a little excited, both by all that she had witnessed, and all that she had not; and her bright and beautiful eyes were raised to her uncle's face, as she inquired, "How did all this happen? You said you would tell me when they were gone."

Mr. Croyland gazed at her with that sort of parental tenderness which he had long poured in his heart towards her; and certainly, as she sat there, leaning lightly upon her arm, and with the sunshine falling upon her beautiful form, her left hand resting upon her knee, and one small beautiful foot extended beyond her gown, he could not help thinking her the loveliest creature he had ever beheld in his life, and asking himself — "Is such a being as that, so full of grace in person, and excellence in mind, to be consigned to a rude, brutal bully, like the man who has just met with deserved chastisement at my door?"

He had just begun to answer her question, thinking how he might best do so without inflicting more pain upon her than necessary, when the black servant I have mentioned entered the drawing room, saying, "A man want to speak to you, master."

"A man!" cried Mr. Croyland, impatiently. "What man? I don't want any man! I've had enough of men for one morning, surely, with those two fools fighting just opposite my house! — What sort of a man is it?"

"Very odd man, indeed, master," answered the Hindoo. "Got great blue pattern on him's face. Strange looking man. Think him half mad," and he made a deferential bow, as if submitting his judgment to that of his master.

"Well, I like odd men," exclaimed Mr. Croyland. "I like strange men better than any others. I'm not sure I do not like

them a *leetle* mad — not too much, not too much, you know, Edith, my dear! Not dangerous; just mad enough to be pleasant, but not furious or obstreperous. — Where have you put him?"

"In de library, master," replied the man; "and he begin taking down the books directly."

"High time I should go and see, who is so studiously inclined," said Mr. Croyland; "or he may not only take down the books, but take them away. That wouldn't do, you know, Edith, my dear — that wouldn't do. Without my niece and my books, what would become of me? I don't intend to lose either the one or the other. So that you are never to marry, my love; mind that, you are never to marry!"

Edith smiled faintly — very faintly indeed; but for the world she would not have made her uncle feel that he had touched upon a tender point. "I do not think I ever shall, my dear uncle," she answered; and saying, "That's a good girl!" the old gentleman hurried out of the room to see his unknown visitor.

Edith remained for some time where she was, in deep and even painful thoughts. All that she had learnt from her sister, since Zara's explanation with Sir Edward Digby, amounted but to this, that he whom she had so deeply loved — whom she still loved so deeply — was yet living. Nothing more had reached her; and, though hope, the fast clinger to the last wreck of probability, yet whispered that he might love her still — that she might not be forgotten — that she might not be abandoned, yet fear and despondency far predominated, and their hoarse tones nearly drowned the feeble whisper of a voice which once had been loud and gay in her heart.

After meditating, then, for some minutes, she rose and left the drawing-room, passing, on her way to the stairs, the door of the library to which her uncle had previously gone. She heard him talking loud as she went along; but the sounds were gay, cheerful, and anything but angry; and another voice was answering, in mellow tones, somewhat melancholy, indeed, but still not sad. Going rapidly by, this was all she distinguished; but after she reached her own room, which was nearly above the library, the murmur of the voices still rose up for more than an hour, and at

length Mr. Croyland and his guest came out, and walked through the vestibule to the door.

"God bless you, Harry — God bless you!" said Mr. Croyland, with an appearance of warmth and affection which Edith had seldom known him to display towards any one; "if you won't stay, I can't help it. But mind your promise — mind your promise! In three or four days, you know;" and with another cordial farewell they parted.

When the stranger was gone, however, Mr. Croyland remained standing in the vestibule for several minutes, gazing down upon the floor-cloth, and murmuring to himself various broken sentences, from time to time. "Who 'd have thought it," he said; "thirty years come Lady-day next, since we saw each other! — But this isn't quite right of the boy: I will scold him — I will frighten him, too. He shouldn't deceive — nobody should deceive — it's not right. But after all, in love and war, every stratagem is fair, they say; and I'll work for him, that I will. Here, Edith, my love," he continued, calling up the stairs, for he had heard his niece's light foot above, "come, and take a walk with me, my dear: it will do us both good."

Edith came down in a moment, with a hat (or bonnet) in her hand; and although Mr. Croyland affected, on most occasions, to be by no means communicative, yet there was in his whole manner, and in the expression of his face, quite sufficient to indicate to his niece, that he was labouring under the pressure of a secret, which was not a very sad or dark one.

"There, my dear!" he exclaimed, "I said just now that I would not have you marry; but I shall take off the restriction. I will not prohibit the banns — only in case you should wish to marry some one I don't approve. But I've got a husband for you — I've got a husband for you, better than all the Radfords that ever were christened; though, by the way, I doubt whether these fellows ever were christened at all — a set of unbelieving, half-barbarous sceptics. I do not think, upon my conscience, that old Radford believes in anything but the existence of his own individuality."

"But who is the husband you have got for me?" demanded Edith, forcing herself to assume a look of gaiety which was not

natural to her. "I hope he 's young, handsome, rich, and agreeable."

"All, all!" cried Mr. Croyland. "Those are absolute requisites in a lady's estimation, I know. Never was such a set of grasping monkeys as you women. Youth, beauty, riches, and a courtly air — you must have them all, or you are dissatisfied; and the ugliest, plainest, poorest woman in all Europe, thinks that she has every right to a phoenix for her companion — an angel — a demi-god. But you shall see — you shall see; and in the true spirit of a fond parent, if you do not see with my eyes, hear with my ears, and understand with my understanding — why, I 'll disinherit you. — But who the mischief is this, now?" he continued, looking out at the door — "another man on horseback, upon my life, as if we had not had enough of them already. Never, since I have been in this county of Kent, has my poor, quiet, peaceable door been besieged in this manner before."

"It 's only a servant with a note, my dear uncle," said Edith.

"Ah, something more on your account," cried Mr. Croyland. "It 's all because you are here. Baba, Baba! see what that fellow wants! — It 's not your promised husband, my dear, so you need not eye him so curiously."

"Oh, no!" answered Edith, smiling. "I took it for granted that my promised husband, as you call him, was to be this same odd, strange-looking gentleman, who has been with you for the last hour."

"Pooh — no!" cried Mr. Croyland; "and yet, my lady, I can tell you, you could not do better in some respects, for he 's a very good man — a very excellent man indeed, and has the advantage of being a *leetle* mad, as I said before — that is, he 's wise enough not to care what fools think of him. That 's what is called being mad now-a-days. Who is it from, Baba?"

"Didn't say, master," answered the Indian, who had just handed him a note. "He wait an answer."

"Oh, very well!" answered Mr. Croyland. "He may get a shorter one than he expects. I 've no time to be answering notes. People in England spend one half of their lives in writing notes that

mean nothing, and the other half in sealing them. Why can't the fools send a message?"

While he had been thus speaking, the worthy old gentleman had been adjusting the spectacles to his nose, and walking with his usual brisk step to the window in the passage, against which he planted his back, so that the light might fall over his shoulder upon the paper; but as he read, a great change came over his countenance.

"Ah, that's right! — That's well! — That's honest," he said: "I see what he means, but I'll let him speak out himself. Walk into the garden, Edith, my love, till I answer this man's note. Baba, bid the fellow wait for a moment," and stepping into the library, Mr. Croyland sought for a pen that would write, and then scrawled, in a very rude and crooked hand, which soon made the paper look like an ancient Greek manuscript, a few lines, to the beauty of which he added the effect of bad blotting-paper. Then folding his note up, he sealed and addressed it, first reading carefully over again the epistle which he had just received, and with which it may be as well to make the reader acquainted, though I shall abstain from looking into Mr. Croyland's answer till it reaches its destination. The letter which the servant had brought was to the following effect:

"The gentleman who had the pleasure of travelling with Mr. Croyland from London, and who was introduced to him by the name of Captain Osborn, was about to avail himself of Mr. Croyland's invitation, when some circumstances came to his knowledge, which seem to render it expedient that he should have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Croyland before he visits his house. He is at present at Woodchurch, and will remain there till two o'clock, if it is convenient for Mr. Croyland to see him at that place to-day. — If not, he will return to Woodchurch to-morrow, towards one, and will wait for Mr. Croyland till any hour he shall appoint."

"There! give that to the gentleman's servant," said Mr. Croyland; and then depositing his spectacles safely in their case, he walked out into the garden to seek Edith.

The servant, in the meanwhile, went at a rapid pace, over

pleasant hill and dale, till he reached the village of Woodchurch, and stopped at a little public-house, before the door of which stood three dragoons, with their horses' bridles over their arms. As speedily as possible, the man entered the house, and walked up stairs, where he found his master talking to a man, covered with dust from the road.

"Mr. Mowle should have given me farther information," the young officer said, looking at a paper in his hand. "I could have made my combinations here as well as at Hythe."

"He 'sent me off in a great hurry, Sir," answered the man; "but I 'll tell him what you say."

"Stay, stay!" said the officer, holding out his hand to his servant for the note which he had brought. "I will tell you more in a minute, and breaking open the seal, he read Mr. Croyland's epistle, which was to the following effect:

"Mr. Croyland presents his compliments to Captain Osborn, and has had the honour of receiving his letter, although he cannot conceive why Captain Osborn should wish to speak with him at Woodchurch, when he could so easily speak with him in his own house, yet Mr. Croyland is Captain Osborn's very humble servant, and will do as he bids him. As it is now past one o'clock, as it would take half-an hour to get Mr. Croyland's carriage ready, and an hour to reach Woodchurch, and as it is some years since Mr. Croyland has got upon the back of anything but an ass, or a hobby-horse, — having moreover no asses at hand with the proper proportion of legs, though many, deficient in number — it is impossible for him to reach Woodchurch by the time stated to-day. He will be over at that place, however, by two o'clock to-morrow, and hopes that Captain Osborn will be able to return with him, and spend a few days in an old bachelor's house."

The young officer's face was grave as he read the first part of the letter, but it relaxed into a smile towards the end. He then gave, perhaps, ten seconds to thought; after which, rousing himself abruptly, he turned to the dusty messenger from Hythe, and fixing a somewhat searching glance upon the man's face, he said — "Tell Mr. Mowle that I will be over with him directly, and as the troops, it seems, will be required on the side of Folke-

stone, he must have everything prepared on his part; for we shall have no time to spare."

The man bowed with a stolid look, and withdrew; and after he had left the room, the officer remained silent for a moment or two, looking out of the window till he saw him mount his horse and depart. Then, descending in haste to the inn door, he gave various orders to the dragoons, who were there waiting. To one they were, "Ride off to Folkestone as fast as you can go, and tell Captain Irby to march immediately with his troop to Bilsington, which place he must reach before two o'clock in the morning." To another: "You gallop off to Appledore, and bid the sergeant there bring his party down to Brenzet Corner, in the Marsh, and put himself under the orders of Cornet Joyce." To the third: "You, Wood, be off to Ashford, and tell Lieutenant Green to bring down all his men as far as Bromley Green, taking up the party at Kingsnorth. Let him be there by three; and remember, these are private orders. Not a word to any one."

The men sprang into the saddle, as soon as the last words were spoken, and rode away in different directions; and, after bidding his servant bring round his horse, the young officer remained standing at the door of the inn, with his tall form erect, his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes gazing towards Harbourne House. He was in the midst of the scenes where his early days had been spent. Every object around him was familiar to his eye: not a hill, not a wood, not a church steeple or a farmhouse, but had its association with some of those bright things which leave a lustre in the evening sky of life, even when the day-star of existence has set. There were the pleasant hours of childhood, the sports of boyhood, the dreams of youth, the love of early manhood. The light that memory cast upon the whole might not be so strong and powerful, might not present them in so real and definite a form, as in the full day of enjoyment; but there is a great difference between that light of memory, when it brightens a period of life that may yet renew the joys which have passed away for a time, and when it shines upon pleasures gone for ever. In the latter case it is but as the moonlight — a reflected beam, without the warmth of fruition or the brilliancy of hope; but in the

former, it is as the glow of the descending sun, which sheds a purple lustre through the vista of the past, and gives a promise of returning joy even as it sinks away. He stood, then, amongst the scenes of his early years, with hope refreshed, though still with the remembrance of sorrows tempering the warmth of expectation, perhaps shading the present. It wanted, indeed, but some small circumstance, by bearing afar, like some light wind, the cloud of thought, to give to all around the bright hues of other days; and that was soon afforded. He had not remained there above two or three minutes when the landlord of the public-house came out, and stood directly before him.

"Oh, I forgot your bill, my good fellow," said the young officer. "What is my score?"

"No, Sir, it is not that," answered the man, "but I think you have forgotten me. I could not let you go, however, without just asking you to shake hands with me, though you are a great gentleman now, and I am much what I was."

The young officer gazed at him for a moment, and let his eye run over the stout limbs and portly person of the landlord, till at length he said, in a doubtful tone, "Surely, you cannot be young Miles, the son of my father's clerk?"

"Ay, Sir, just the same," replied the host; "but young and old, we change, just as women do their names when they marry. Not that six or seven years have made me old either; but I was six and twenty when you went away, and as thin as a whipping post; now I'm two and thirty, and as fat as a porker. That makes a wonderful difference, Sir. But I'm glad you don't forget old times."

"Forget them, Miles!" said the young officer, holding out his hand to him, "oh no, they are too deeply written in my heart ever to be blotted out! I thought I was too much changed myself for any one to remember me, but those who were most dear to me. What between the effects of time and labour, sorrow and war, I hardly fancied that any one in Kent would know me. But you are changed for the better, I for the worse. Yet I am very glad to see you, Miles; and I shall see you again to-morrow; for I am coming back here towards two o'clock. In the meantime, you

need not say you have seen me; for I do not wish it to be known that I am here, till I have learned a little of what reception I am likely to have."

"Oh, I understand, Sir — I understand," replied the landlord; "and if you should want to know how the land lies, I can always tell you; for you see, I have the parish-clerks' club, which meets here once a-week; and then all the news of the country comes out; and besides, many a one of them comes in here at other times, to have a gossip with old Rafe Miles's son, so that I hear everything that goes on in the county almost as soon as it is done; and right glad shall I be to tell you anything you want to know, just for old times' sake; when you used to go shooting snipes by the brooks, and I used to come after for the sport — that is to say, anything about your own people; not about the smugglers, you know; for they say you are sent here to put them down; and I should not like to peach, even to you. I heard that some great gentleman had come down — a Sir Harry Somebody. But I little thought it was you, till I saw you just now standing looking so melancholy towards Harbourne, and thinking, I dare say, of the old house at Tiffenden."

"Indeed I was," answered the young officer, with a sigh. "But as to the smugglers, my good friend, I want no information. I am sent down with my regiment merely to aid the civil power, which seems totally incompetent to stop the daring outrages that are every day committed. If this were suffered to go on, all law, not only regarding the revenue, but even that affecting the protection of life and property, would soon be at an end."

"That it would, Sir," answered the landlord; "and it's well nigh at an end already, for that matter."

"Well," continued the officer, "though the service is not an agreeable one, and I think, considering all things, might have been entrusted to another person, yet I have but to obey; and consequently, being here, am ready whenever called upon to support the officers, either of justice or the revenue, both by arms and by advice. But I have no other duty to perform, and indeed would rather not have any information regarding the proceedings of these misguided men, except through the proper channels. If

I had the absolute command of the district, with orders to put down smuggling therein, it might be a different matter; but I have not."

"Ay, I thought there was a mistake about it," replied Miles; "but here is your horse, Sir, I shall see you to-morrow, then?"

"Certainly," answered the officer; and having paid his score, he mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Colonel of the dragoon regiment rode into Hythe coolly and calmly, followed by his servant; for though, to say the truth, he had pushed his horse very fast for some part of the way, he judged it expedient not to cause any bustle in the town by an appearance of haste and excitement. It was customary in those days for officers in the army in active service, even when not on actual duty, to appear in their regimental uniform; but this practice the gentleman in question had dispensed with since he left London, on many motives, both public and personal; and though he wore the cockade — at that time the sign and symbol of a military man, or of one who affected that position, yet he generally appeared in plain clothes, except when any large body of the troops were gathered together.

At the door of the inn where he had fixed his head-quarters, and in the passage leading from it into the house, were a number of private soldiers and a sergeant; and amongst them appeared Mr. Mowle, the Custom-House officer, waiting the arrival of the commander of the dragoons. As the latter dismounted, Mowle advanced to his side, saying something in a low voice. The young officer looked at the sky, which was still glowing bright with the sun, which had about an hour and a-half to run ere it reached the horizon.

"In an hour, Mr. Mowle," replied the officer; "there will be time enough. Make all your own arrangements in the meanwhile."

"But, Sir, if you have to send to Folkestone?" said Mowle.

"You misunderstood me, I think."

"No, no," answered the Colonel, "I did not. You misunder-

stood me. Come back in an hour. — If you show haste or anxiety, you will put the enemy on his guard.”

After having said these few words in a low tone, he entered the house, gave some orders to the soldiers, several of whom sauntered away slowly to their quarters, as if the business of the day were over; and then, proceeding to his own room, he rang the bell and ordered dinner.

“I thought there was a bit of a bustle, Sir?” said the landlord, inquiringly, as he put the first dish upon the table.

“Oh dear, no,” replied the Colonel. “Did you mean about these men who have escaped?”

“I didn’t know about what, Colonel,” answered the landlord, “but seeing Mr. Mowle waiting for you —”

“You thought it must be about them,” added the officer; “but you are mistaken, my good friend. There is no bustle at all. The men will, doubtless, soon be taken, one after the other, by the constables. At all events, that is an affair with which I can have nothing to do.”

The landlord immediately retreated, loaded with intelligence, and informed two men who were sipping rum-and-water in the tap-room, that Mowle had come to ask the Colonel to help in apprehending “the Major” and others who had been rescued, and that the Colonel would have nothing to do with it.

The men finished their grog much more rapidly than they had begun it, and then walked out of the house, probably to convey the tidings elsewhere. Now, the town of Hythe is composed, as every one knows, of one large and principal street nearly at the bottom of the hill, with several back streets — or perhaps lanes we might call them — running parallel to the first, and a great number of shorter ones running up and down the hill, and connecting the principal thoroughfare with those behind it. Many — nay, I might say most — of the houses in the main street had, at the time I speak of, a back as well as a front entrance. They might sometimes have even more than one; for there were trades carried on in Hythe, as the reader has been made aware, which occasionally required rapid and secret modes of exit. Nor was the house in which the young commander of dragoons resided without

its conveniences in this respect; but it so happened that Mowle, the officer, was well acquainted with all its different passages and contrivances; and consequently he took advantage, on his return at the end of an hour, of one of the small lanes, which led him by a back way into the inn. Then ascending a narrow staircase without disturbing anybody, he made his way to the room he sought, where he found the Colonel of the regiment quietly writing some letters after his brief meal was over.

"Well, Mr. Mowle!" said the young officer, folding up, and sealing the note he had just concluded — "now, let me hear what you have discovered, and where you wish the troops to be."

"I am afraid, Sir, we have lost time," answered Mowle; "for I can't tell at what time the landing will take place."

"Not before midnight," replied his companion; "there is no vessel in sight, and, with the wind at this quarter, they can't be very quick in their movements."

"Why, probably not before midnight, Sir," answered Mowle; "but there are not above fifty of your men within ten miles round, and if you've to send for them to Folkestone and Ashford, and out almost to Staplehurst, they will have no time to make ready and march; and the fellows will be off into the Weald before we can catch them."

The young officer smiled: "Then you think fifty men will not be enough?" he asked.

"Not half enough," answered Mowle, beginning to set down his companion as a person of very little intellect or energy — "why, from what I hear, there will be some two or three hundred of these fellows down, to carry the goods after they are run, and every one of them equal to a dragoon, at any time."

"Well, we shall see!" said the young officer, coolly. "You are sure that Dymchurch is the place?"

"Why, somewhere thereabouts, Sir; and that's a long way off," answered Mowle; "so if you have any arrangements to make, you had better make them."

"They are all made," replied the Colonel; "but tell me, Mr. Mowle, does it not frequently take place that, when smugglers

are pursued in the Marsh, they throw their goods into the cuts and canals and creeks by which it is intersected."

"To be sure they do, Sir," exclaimed the officer; "and they'll do that to a certainty, if we can't prevent them landing; and, if we attack them in the Marsh —"

"To prevent them landing," said the gentleman, "seems to me impossible in the present state of affairs; and I do not know whether it would be expedient, even if we could. Your object is to seize the goods, both for your own benefit and that of the state, and to take as many prisoners as possible. Now, from what you told me yesterday, I find that you have no force at sea, except a few miserable boats —"

"I sent off for the revenue cruiser this morning, Sir," answered Mowle.

"But she is not come," rejoined the officer; "and, consequently, must be thrown out of our combinations. If we assemble a large force at any point of the coast, the smugglers on shore will have warning. They may easily find means of giving notice of the fact to their comrades at sea — the landing may be effected at a different point from that now proposed, and the goods carried clear off before we can reach them. It seems to me, therefore, better for you to let the landing take place quietly. As soon as it has taken place, the beacons will be lighted by my orders; the very fact of a signal they don't understand will throw the smugglers into some confusion; and they will hurry out of the Marsh as fast as possible —"

"But suppose they separate, and all take different roads," said Mowle.

"Then all, or almost all, the different parties will be met with and stopped," replied the officer.

"But your men cannot act without a requisition from the Customs, Sir," answered Mowle, "and they are so devilish cautious of committing themselves —"

"But I am not," rejoined the Colonel; "and every party along the whole line has notice that the firing of the beacons is to be taken as a signal that due requisition has been made, and has orders also to stop any body of men carrying goods that they may

meet with. But I do not think that these smugglers will separate at all, Mr. Mowle. Their only chance of safety must seem to them — not knowing how perfectly prepared we are — to lie in their numbers and their union. While acting together, their numbers, it appears from your account, would be sufficient to force any one post opposed to them, according to the arrangements which they have every reason to believe still exist; and they will not throw away that chance. It is, therefore, my belief that they will make their way out of the Marsh in one body. After that, leave them to me. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

"Very well, Colonel — very well!" said Mowle; "if you are ready without my knowing anything about it, all the better. Only the fellow I sent you brought back word something about Folkestone."

"That was merely because I did not like the man's look," replied the young officer, "and thought you would understand that a message sent you in so public a manner, upon a business which required secrecy, must not be read in its direct sense."

"Oh, I see, Colonel — I see," cried the officer of Customs; "it was stupid enough not to understand. All my people are ready, however; and if we could but discover the hour the run is to be made, we should have a pretty sure game of it."

"Cannot the same person who gave you so much intelligence, give you that also?" asked his companion.

"Why, no; either the imp can't, or he won't," said Mowle. "I had to pay him ten pounds for what tidings I got, for the little wretch is as cunning as Satan."

"Are you sure the intelligence was correct?" demanded the officer of dragoons.

"Oh yes, Sir," replied Mowle. "His tidings have always been quite right; and besides, I've the means of testing this myself; for he told me where they are to meet — at least a large party of them — before going down to the shore. I've a very great mind to disguise myself, and creep in among them."

"A very hazardous experiment, I should think," said the Colonel; "and I do not see any object worth the risk."

"Why, the object would be to get information of the hour,"

answered Mowle. "If we could learn that, some time before, we could have everything ready, and have them watched all through the Marsh."

"Well, you must use your own judgment in that particular!" answered the young officer; "but I tell you, I am quite prepared myself; and such a large body as you have mentioned cannot cross a considerable extent of country without attracting attention."

"Well, I'll see, Sir — I'll see," answered Mowle; "but had I not better send off two or three officers towards Dymchurch, to give your men notice as soon as the goods are landed?"

"Undoubtedly," answered the Colonel. "There's a party at New Romney, and a party at Burmarsh. They both have their orders, and as soon as they have intimation, will act upon them. I would have enough men present, if I were you, to watch the coast well, but with strict orders to do nothing to create alarm."

Some minor arrangements were then entered into, of no great importance to the tale; and Mowle took his leave, after having promised to give the Colonel the very first intimation he received of the further proceedings of the smugglers.

The completion of his own arrangements took the Custom-House officer half an hour more, and at the end of that time he returned to his own dwelling, and sat down for a while, to think over the next step. He felt a strong inclination to visit the meeting place of the smugglers in person. He was, as we have shown, a man of a daring and adventurous disposition, strong in nerve, firm in heart, and with, perhaps, too anxious a sense of duty. Indeed, he was rather inclined to be rash than otherwise, from the apprehension of having anything like fear attributed to him in the execution of the service he had undertaken; but still he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the scheme he meditated was full of peril to himself. The men amongst whom he proposed to venture were lawless, sanguinary, and unscrupulous; and, if discovered, he had every reason to believe that his life would be sacrificed by them without the slightest hesitation or remorse. He was their most persevering enemy; he had spared them on no occasion; and although he had dealt fairly by them, yet many of those who were likely to be present, had suffered severe punish-

ment at his instigation and by his means. He hesitated a little, and called to mind what the Colonel had said regarding the hazard of the act, and the want of sufficient object; but then, suddenly starting up, he looked forward with a frowning brow, exclaiming, "Why, hang it, I'm not afraid! I'll go, whatever befalls me. It's my duty not to leave any chance for information untried. That young fellow is mighty cool about the business; and if these men get off, it shall not be any fault of mine."

Thus saying, he lighted a candle, and went into an adjoining room, where, from a large commode, filled with a strange medley of different dresses and implements, he chose out a waggoner's frock, a large pair of leathern leggings, or gaiters, and a straw hat, such as was very commonly used at that time amongst the peasantry of England. After gazing at them for a moment or two, and turning them over once or twice, he put them on, and then, with a pair of sharp scissors, cut away, in a rough and uncere- monious fashion, a considerable quantity of his black hair, which was generally left rough and floating. High up over his neck, and round his chin, he tied a large blue handkerchief, and when thus completely accoutred, gave himself a glance in the glass, saying, "I don't think I should know myself."

He seemed considerably reassured at finding himself so completely disguised; and then looking at his watch, and perceiving that the hour named for the meeting was approaching, he put a brace of pistols in his breast, where they could be easily reached through the opening in front of the smock-frock.

He had already reached the door, when something seemed to strike him; and saying to himself — "Well, there's no knowing what may happen! — it's better to prepare against anything," he turned back to his sitting-room, and wrote down on a sheet of paper:

"Sir, — I am gone up to see what they are about. If I should not be back by eleven, you may be sure they have caught me, and then you must do your best with Birchett and the others. If I get off, I'll call in as I come back, and let you know.

"Sir, your very obedient servant,

"WILLIAM MOWLE."

As soon as this was done, he folded the note up, addressed, and sealed it; and then, blowing the light out, he called an old female servant who had lived in his house for many years, and whom he now directed to carry the epistle to the Colonel of Dragoons who was up at the inn, adding that she was to deliver it with her own hand.

The old woman took it at once; and knowing well, how usual it was for the Custom-House officers to disguise their persons in various ways, she took no notice of the strange change in Mr. Mowle's appearance, though it was so complete that it could not well escape her eyes, even in the darkness which reigned throughout the house.

This having been all arranged, and the maid on her way to convey the letter, Mowle himself walked slowly forward through the long narrow lanes at the back of the town, and along the path up towards Saltwood. It was dusk when he set out, but not yet quite dark; and as he went, he met two people of the town, whom he knew well, but who only replied to the awkward nod of the head which he gave them, by saying, "Good night, my man," and walked on, evidently unconscious that they were passing an acquaintance.

As he advanced, however, the night grew darker and more dark; and a fog began to rise, though not so thick as that of the night before. Mowle muttered to himself, as he observed it creeping up the hill from the side of the valley, "Ay, this is what the blackguards calculated upon, and they are always sure to be right about the weather; but it will serve my turn as well as theirs;" and on he went in the direction of the castle, keeping the regular road by the side of the hill, and eschewing especially the dwelling of Galley Ray and her grandson.

Born in that part of the country, and perfectly well prepared, both to find his way about every part of the ruins, and to speak the dialect of the county in its broadest accent, if he should be questioned, the darkness was all that he could desire; and it was with pleasure that he found the obscurity so deep that even he could not see the large stones which at that time lay in the road, causing him to stumble more than once as he approached the

castle. He was in some hope, indeed, of reaching the ruins before the smugglers began to assemble, and of finding a place of concealment whence he could overhear their sayings and doings; but in this expectation, he discovered, as he approached the walls, that he should be disappointed; for in the open road between the castle and the village, he found a number of horses tied, and two men watching. He trudged on past them, however, with a slow step and a slouching gait; and when one of the men called out, "Is that you, Jack?" he answered, "Ay, ay!" without stopping.

At the gate of the court he heard a good many voices talking within; and, it must be acknowledged, that, although as brave a man as ever lived, he was not without a strong sense of the dangers of his situation. But he suffered it not to master him in the least; and advancing resolutely, he soon got the faint outline of several groups of men — amounting in the whole to about thirty — assembled on the green between the walls and the keep. Walking resolutely up to one of these little knots, he looked boldly amongst the persons it comprised as if seeking for somebody. Their faces could scarcely be distinguished; but the voices of one or two who were talking together, showed him that the group was a hazardous one, as it contained several of the most notorious smugglers of the neighbourhood, who had but too good cause to be well acquainted with his person and his tongue. He went on, consequently, to the next little party, which he soon judged, from the conversation he overheard, to be principally composed of strangers. One man spoke of how they did those things in Sussex, and told of how he had aided to haul up, Heaven knows how many bales of goods over the bare face of the cliff between Hastings and Winchelsea. Judging, therefore, that he was here in security, the officer attached himself to this group, and, after a while, ventured to ask, "Do ye know what's to be the hour, about?"

The man he spoke to answered "No!" adding that, they could not tell anything "till the gentleman came." This, however, commenced a conversation, and Mowle was speedily identified with that group, which, consisting entirely of strangers, as he had supposed, did not mingle much with the rest. Every

one present was armed; and he found that though some had come on foot like himself, the greater part had journeyed on horseback. He had a good opportunity also of learning that, notwithstanding every effort made by the Government, the system of smuggling was carried on along the coast to a much greater extent than even he himself had been aware of. Many of his brother officers were spoken of in high terms of commendation, which did not sound very satisfactory to his ears; and many a hint for his future operations, he gained from the gossip of those who surrounded him.

Still time wore on, and he began to be a little uneasy lest he should be detained longer than the hour which he had specified in his note to the Colonel of Dragoons. But at length, towards ten o'clock, the quick tramping of a number of horses were heard, and several voices speaking; and a minute after, five or six and twenty men entered the grass court, and came up hastily to the rest.

"Now, are you all ready?" cried a voice, which Mowle instantly recognised as that of young Radford.

"Yes, we 've been waiting these two hours," answered one of those in the group which the officer had first approached; "but you 'll never have enough here, Sir."

"Never you mind that," rejoined Richard Radford, "there are eighty more at Lympne, and a good number down at Dymchurch already, with plenty of horses. Come, muster, muster, and let us be off, for the landing will begin at one, and we have a good long way to go. — Remember, every one," he continued, raising his voice, "that the way is by Butter's Bridge, and then down and along the shore. If any one takes the road by Burmarsh he will fall in with the dragoons. Troop off, my men, troop off. You Ned, and you Major, see that the court is quite cleared; we must have none lagging behind."

This precaution did not at all disconcert our good friend Mowle, for he judged that he should very easily find the means of detaching himself from the rest, at the nearest point to Hythe; and accordingly he walked on with the party he had joined, till they arrived at the spot where they had seen the horses tied. There, however, the greater part mounted, and the others joined

a different body, which Mowle was well aware was not quite so safe; for acting as the chief thereof, and looking very sharply after his party too, was no other than our friend the Major. Mowle now took good care to keep silence — a prudent step, which was enjoined upon them all by Mr. Radford and some others, who seemed to have the direction of the affair. But notwithstanding every care, the tread of so many men and so many horses made a considerable noise; and just as they were passing a small cottage, not a quarter of a mile from Saltwood, the good dame within opened the door to see what such a bustle could be about. As she did so, the light from the interior fell full upon Mowle's face, and the eyes of the Major, turned towards the door at the same moment, rested upon him for an instant, and were then withdrawn. It were vain to say, that the worthy officer felt quite as comfortable at that moment as if he had been in his own house; but when no notice was taken, he comforted himself with the thought that his disguise had served him well, and trudged on with the rest, without showing any hesitation or surprise. About half a mile farther lay the turning which he proposed to take to reach Hythe; and he contrived to get over to the left side of the party, in order to drop off in that direction unperceived. When he was within ten steps of it, however, and was congratulating himself that the party, having scattered a little, gave him greater facilities for executing his scheme, an arm was familiarly thrust through his own, and a pair of lips, close to his ear, said in a low, but very distinct tone, "I know you — and if you attempt to get off, you are a dead man! Continue with the party, and you are safe. When the goods are landed and gone, you shall go; but the least suspicious movement before, shall bring twenty bullets into your head. You did me a good turn yesterday morning before the Justices, in not raking up old offences; and I am willing to do you a good turn now; but this is all I can do for you."

Mowle turned round, well knowing the voice, nodded his head, and walked on with the rest in the direction of Lympe.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOWARDS half-past ten o'clock at night, the Inn at Hythe was somewhat quieter than it had been on the evening before. This was not a punch club night; there was no public dinner going forward; a great many accustomed guests were absent, and the house was left nearly vacant of all visitors, except the young commandant of the dragoons, his two or three servants, and three stout-looking old soldiers, who had come in about ten, and taken possession of the tap-room, in their full uniform, scaring away, as it would seem, a sharp-looking man, who had been previously drinking there in solitude, only cheered by the occasional visits and brief conversation of the landlord. The officer himself was up stairs in his room, with a soldier at his door, as usual, and was supposed by all the household to be busy writing; but, in the meanwhile, there was a good deal of bustle in the stables; and about a quarter before eleven, the ostler came in, and informed the landlord, that they were saddling three of the Colonel's horses, and his two grooms' horses.

"Saddling three!" cried the host; "why, he can't ride three horses at once, anyhow; and where can he be going to ride to-night? I must run and see if I can pump it out of the fellows;" and away he walked to the stables, where he found the men — two grooms, and two helpers — busily engaged in the occupation which the ostler had stated.

"Ah," said the landlord, "so there is something going on to-night?"

"Not that I know of," answered the head groom. "Tie down that holster, Bill. The thongs are loose — don't you see?"

"Oh, but there must be something in the wind," rejoined the landlord, "the Colonel wouldn't ride out so late else."

"Lord bless you!" replied the man, "little you know of his ways. Why, sometimes he'll have us all up at two or three in the morning, just to visit a post of perhaps twenty men. He's a smart officer, I can tell you; and no one must be caught napping in his regiment, that's certain."

"But you have saddled three horses for him!" said the landlord, returning to his axiom; "and he can't ride three at once, any how."

"Ay, but who can tell which he may like to ride?" rejoined the groom, "we shan't know anything about that, till he comes into the stable, most likely."

"And where is he going to, to-night?" asked the landlord.

"We can't tell that he's going anywhere," answered the man; "but if he does, I should suppose it would be to Folkestone. The Major is away on leave, you know; and it is just as likely as not, that he'll go over to see that all's right there."

The worthy host was not altogether satisfied with the information he received; but as he clearly saw that he should get no more, he retired, and went into the tap, to try the dragoons, without being more successful in that quarter than he had been in the stables.

In the meantime, his guest up stairs had finished his letters — had dressed himself in uniform — armed himself, and laid three brace of pistols, charged, upon the table, for the holsters of his saddles; and then taking a large map of the county, he leaned over it, tracing the different roads, which at that time intersected the Weald of Kent. Two or three times he took out his watch; and as the hour of eleven drew near, he began to feel considerable alarm for the fate of poor Mowle.

"If they discover him, they will murder him, to a certainty," he thought; "and I believe a more honest fellow does not live. — It was a rash and foolish undertaking. The measures I have adopted could not fail. — Hark! there is the clock striking. We must lose no more time. We may save him yet, or at all events, avenge him." He then called the soldier from the door, and sent off a messenger to the house of the second officer of Customs, named Birchett, who came up in a few minutes.

"Mr. Birchett," said the Colonel, "I fear our friend Mowle has got himself into a scrape;" and he proceeded to detail as many of the circumstances as were necessary to enable the other to comprehend the situation of affairs; and ended by asking, "Are you prepared to act in Mr. Mowle's absence?"

"Oh, yes, Sir," answered Birchett. "Mowle did not tell me the business; but he said, I must have my horse saddled. He was always a close fellow, and kept all the intelligence to himself."

"In this case it was absolutely necessary," replied the Colonel; "but without any long explanations, I think you had better ride down towards Dymchurch at once, with all the men you can trust, keeping as sharp a look-out as you can on the coast, and sending me information the moment you receive intelligence that the run has been effected. Do not attempt to attack the smugglers without sufficient force; but despatch two men by different roads, to intimate the fact to me at Aldington Knowle, where I shall be found throughout the night."

"Ay, Sir," answered the officer, "but suppose the fellows take along by Burmarsh, and so up to Hardy Pool. They will pass you, and be off into the country before anything can be done."

"They will be stopped at Burmarsh," replied the Colonel; "orders have been given to barricade the road at nightfall, and to defend the hamlet against any one coming from the sea. I shall establish another post at Lympne as I go. Leave all that to me."

"But you must have a requisition, Sir, or I suppose you are not authorized to act," said the officer. "I will get one for you in a minute."

"I have one," answered the Colonel, laying hand on the papers before him; "but even were it not so, I should act on my own responsibility. This is no ordinary case, Mr. Birchett. All you have to do is to ride off towards Dymchurch as fast as you can, to give me notice that the smugglers have landed their goods as soon as you find that such is the case, and to add any information that you can gain respecting the course they have taken. Remember, not to attack them unless you find that you have sufficient force, but follow and keep them in sight as far as you can."

"It's such a devilish foggy night, Sir," said Birchett.

"It will be clearer inland," replied the young officer; "and we shall catch them at day break. We can only fail from want of good information; so see that I have the most speedy intelligence. But stay — lest anything should go wrong, or be misunderstood

with regard to the beacons, you may as well, if you have men to spare, send off as you pass, after the run has been effected, to the different posts at Brenzet, at Snave, at Ham Street, with merely these words, 'The goods are landed. The smugglers are at such a place.' The parties will act upon the orders they have already received. Now away, and lose no time!"

The riding officer hurried off, and the Colonel of the regiment descended to the court-yard. In three minutes more the sound of a trumpet was heard in the streets of Hythe, and in less than ten, a party of about thirty dragoons were marching out of the town towards Lympne. A halt for about five minutes was made at the latter place, and the small party of soldiers was diminished to about half its number. Information, too, was there received, from one of the cottagers, of a large body of men (magnified in his account into three or four hundred) having gone down into the Marshes about half an hour before; but the commanding officer made no observation in reply, and having given the orders he thought necessary, rode on towards Aldington. The fog was thick in all the low ground, but cleared away a good deal upon the more elevated spots; and as they were rising one of the hills, the serjeant who was with the party exclaimed, "There is something very red up there, Sir! It looks as if there were a beacon lighted up, if we could see it for the fog."

The young officer halted for a moment, looked round, and then rode on till he reached the summit of the hill, whence a great light, clearly proceeding from a beacon, was discovered to the north-east.

"That must be near Postling," he said. "We have no party there. It must be some signal of their own." And as he rode on, he thought, "It is not impossible that poor Mowle's rashness may have put these men on their guard, and thus thwarted the whole scheme. That is clearly some warning to their boats."

But ere a quarter of an hour more had passed, he saw the probability of still more disastrous effects, resulting from the lighting of the beacon on Tolsford Hill; for another flame shot up, casting a red glare through the haze from the side of Burmarsh,

and then another and another, till the dim air seemed all tinged with flame.

“An unlucky error,” he said to himself. “Serjeant Jackson should have known that we have no party in that quarter; and the beacons were only to be lighted, from the first towards Hythe. It is very strange how the clearest orders are sometimes misunderstood.”

He rode on, however, at a quick pace, till he reached Aldington Knowle, and had found the highest ground in the neighbourhood, whence, after pausing for a minute or two to examine the country, as marked out by the various fires, he dispatched three of the dragoons in different directions, with orders to the parties in the villages round to disregard the lights they saw, and not to act upon the orders previously given, till they received intimation that the smugglers were on the march.

It was now about midnight, and during nearly two hours the young officer remained stationed upon the hill without any one approaching, or any sound breaking the stillness of the night but the stamping of the horses of his little force and the occasional clang of the soldiers' arms. At the end of that period, the tramp of horse coming along the road at a quick pace from the side of Hythe, was heard by the party on the more elevated ground at a little distance from the highway. There was a tightening of the bridle and a movement of the heel amongst the men, to bring their chargers into more regular line; but not a word was said, and the Colonel remained in front, with his arms crossed upon his chest and his rein thrown down, while what appeared from the sound to be a considerable body of cavalry, passed before him. He could not see them, it is true, from the darkness of the night; but his ear recognised in a moment the jingling of the dragoons' arms, and he concluded rightly, that the party consisted of the company which he had ordered from Folkestone down to Bilsington. As soon as they had gone on, he detached a man to the next cross road on the same side, with orders, if he perceived any body of men coming across from the side of the Marsh, to ride forward at once to the officer in command at Bilsington, and direct him to move to the north, keeping the Priory wood on the right, till he

reached the cross-roads at the corner, and wait there for further orders. The beacons had by this time burnt out; and all remained dark and still for about half an hour more, when the quick galloping of a horse was heard coming from the side of the Marsh. A pause took place as soon as the animal reached the high road, as if the rider had halted to look for some one he had expected; and — dashing down instantly through the gate of the field, which had been opened by the dragoons to gain the highest point of ground — the young officer exclaimed, “Who goes there?”

“Ah, Colonel, is that you?” cried the voice of Birchett. “They are coming up as fast as they can come, and will pass either by Bilsington or Bonnington. There’s a precious lot of them — I never saw such a number gathered before. Mowle’s gone, poor fellow, to a certainty; for we’ve seen nothing of him down there.”

“Nor I either,” answered the young officer, with a sigh. “I hope you have left men to watch them, Mr. Birchett.”

“Oh yes, Sir,” replied the officer. “I thought it better to come up myself, than trust to any other. But I left Clinch and the rest there, and sent off, as you told me, to all your posts.”

“You are sure they will come by Bilsington or Bonnington, and not strike off by Kitsbridge, towards Ham Street or Warehorn?” demanded the young officer.

“If they do, they’ll have to turn all the way back,” answered Birchett; “for I saw them to the crossing of the roads, and then came across by Sherlock’s Bridges and the horse-road to Hurst.”

“And are you quite sure,” continued the Colonel, “that your messengers will reach the parties at Brenzet or Snave?”

“Quite, Sir,” answered the Custom-House officer; “for I did not send them off till the blackguards had passed, and the country behind was clear.”

“That was judicious; and we have them,” rejoined the young officer. “I trust they may take by Bonnington; but it will be necessary to ascertain the fact. You shall go down, Mr. Birchett, yourself, with some of the troopers, and reconnoitre. Go as cautiously as possible; and if you see or hear them passing, fall back quietly. If they do not appear in reasonable time, send me intelligence. You can calculate the distances better than I can.”

"I believe they will go by Bonnington," said the Customs officer; "for it's much shorter, and I think they must know of your party at Bilsington; though, to be sure, they could easily force that, for it is but a sergeant's guard."

"You are mistaken," answered the Colonel. "Captain Irby is there with his troop; and, together with the parties moving up, on a line with the smugglers from the Marsh, he will have a hundred and fifty men, either in Bilsington, or three miles in his rear. Nevertheless, we must give him help, in case they take that road; so you had better ride down at once, Mr. Birchett."

And, ordering three of the privates to accompany the Custom-House officer, with renewed injunctions to caution and silence, he resumed his position on the hill, and waited in expectation of the result.

CHAPTER XX.

THE cottages round Dymchurch, and the neighbourhood of the Gut, as it is called, showed many a cheerful light about eleven o'clock, on the night of which we have just been speaking; and, as the evening had been cold and damp, it seemed natural enough to the two officers of Customs stationed in the place — or at least they chose to think so — that the poor people should have a fire to keep them warm. If they had judged it expedient to go forth, instead of remaining in the house appropriated to them, they might indeed have discovered a fragrant odour of good Hollands, and every now and then a strong smell of brandy, issuing from any hovel door that happened to open as they passed. But the two officers did not judge it expedient to go forth; for it was late, they were warm and comfortable where they were, a good bowl of punch stood before them, and one of them, as he ladled out the exhilarating liquor to the other, remarked, with philosophical sagacity, "It's such a foggy night, who the deuce could see anything on the water even if they went to look for it?"

The other laughed, with a meaning wink of his eye, and perfectly agreed in the justice of his companion's observation. "Well, we must go out, Jim, about twelve," he said, "just to let old

Mowle see that we are looking about; but you can go down to High Nook, and I can pretend I heard something suspicious in the Marsh, farther up. Otherwise, we shall be broke, to a certainty."

"I don't care, if I am broke," answered the other. "I've got all that I want now, and can set up a shop."

"Well, I should like to hold on a little longer," replied his more prudent companion; "and besides, if they found us out, they might do worse than discharge us."

"But how the deuce should they find us out?" asked the other. "Nobody saw me speak to the old gentleman; and nobody saw you. I didn't: nor did you see me. So we can say nothing, and nobody else can say anything — I shan't budge."

"Well, I shall!" said the other. "'T is but a walk; and you know quite well, Jim, that if we keep to the westward, it's all safe."

It was evident to the last speaker that his comrade had drunk quite enough punch; but still they went on till the bowl was finished; and then, the one going out, the other did not choose to remain, but issued forth also, cursing and growling as he went. The murmur of a good many voices to the eastward of Dymchurch saluted their ears the moment they quitted the house; but that sound only induced them to hasten their steps in the opposite direction.

The noise which produced this effect upon the officers, had also been heard by another person, who was keeping his solitary watch on the low shore, three or four hundred yards from the village; and to him it was a pleasant sound. He had been on the look-out there for nearly two hours; and no sight had he seen, nor sound had he heard, but the water coming up as the tide made, and every now and then driving him further back to avoid the ripple of the wave. Two or three minutes after, a step could be distinguished; and some one gave a whistle.

The watcher whistled in return; and the next instant he was joined by another person, somewhat taller than himself, who inquired, "Have you heard anything of them yet?"

"No, Sir," answered the man, in a respectful tone. "Everything has been as still and as sleepy as an old woman's cat."

"Then what the devil's the meaning of these fires all over the country?" asked young Radford; for he it was who had come down.

"Fires, Sir?" said the man. "Why they were to light one upon Tolsford Hill, when Harding sent up the rockets; but I have heard of none but that, and have seen none at all."

"Why, they are blazing all over the country," cried young Radford, from Tolsford to Dungeness. "If it's any of our people that have done it, they must be mad."

"Well, if they have lighted the one at Tolsford," answered the man, "we shall soon have Tom Hazlewood down to tell us more; for he was to set off and gallop as fast as possible, whenever he saw anything."

Young Radford made no reply, but stood musing in silence for two or three minutes; and then starting, he exclaimed, "Hark! wasn't that a cheer from the sea?"

"I didn't hear it," answered the man; "but I thought I heard some one riding."

Young Radford listened; but all seemed still for a moment, till, coming upon harder ground, a horse's feet sounded distinctly.

"Tom Hazlewood, I think," cried Radford. "Run up, and see, Bill!"

"He'll come straight down here, Sir," replied the man; "he knows where to find me." And almost as he spoke, a man on horseback galloped up, saying, "They must be well in shore now."

"Who the devil lighted all those fires?" exclaimed young Radford. "Why they will alarm the whole country!"

"I don't know, Sir," answered the man on horseback; "I lighted the one at Tolsford, but I've nothing to do with the others, and don't know who lighted them."

"Then you saw the rockets?" demanded the young gentleman.

"Quite clear, Sir," replied Hazlewood; "I got upon the highest point that I could find, and kept looking out over the sea,

thinking I should see nothing; for though it was quite clear up so high, and the stars shining as bright as possible, yet all underneath was like a great white cloud rolled about; but suddenly, as I was looking over this way, I saw something like a star shoot up from the cloud and burst into a thousand bright sparks, making quite a blaze all round it; and then came another, and then another. So, being quite sure that it was Jack Harding at sea, I ran down as hard as I could to where I had left Peter by the pile of wood and the two old barrels, and taking the candle out of his lantern, thrust it in. As soon as it was in a blaze, I got outside my horse and galloped down; for he could not be more than two or three miles out when I saw the rockets."

"Then he must be close in now," answered Richard Radford; "and we had better get all the men down, and spread out."

"There will be time enough, Sir, I should think," observed the man on foot, "for he 'll get the big boats in, as near as he can, before he loads the little ones."

"I will fire a pistol, to let him know where we are," answered young Radford; and drawing one from his belt, he had cocked it, when the man on foot stopped him, saying, "There are two officers in Dymchurch, you know, Sir, and they may send off for troops."

"Pooh — nonsense!" replied Richard Radford, firing the pistol in the air; "do you think we would have left them there, if we were not sure of them?"

In somewhat less than a minute, a distinct cheer was heard from the sea; and at the sound of the pistol, a crowd of men and horses, which in the mist and darkness seemed innumerable, began to gather down upon the shore, as near to the water's edge as they could come. A great many lanterns were produced, and a strange and curious sight it was to see the number of wild-looking faces which appeared by that dim, uncertain light.

"Ned Ramley!" cried young Radford.

"Here I am, Sir," answered a voice close at hand.

"Where 's the Major?"

"Major! Major!" shouted Ramley.

"Coming," answered a voice at some distance. "Stand by him, and do as I told you!"

"What 's the matter?" demanded Richard Radford, as the Major came up.

"Oh, nothing, Sir!" replied the other; "only a man I found lurking about. He says he 's willing to help; but I thought it best to set a watch upon him, as I don't know him."

"That was right," said the young gentleman. "But, hark!—there are the oars!" And the sound of the regular sweep, and the shifting beat of the oar against the rowlocks, was distinctly heard by all present. Some of the men waded down into the water, there being very little sea running, and soon, through the mist, six boats of a tolerable size could be seen pulling hard towards the land. In another moment, amidst various cries and directions, they touched the shore. Several men jumped out of each into the water, and a number of the party which had come down to meet them; running in, caught hold of the ropes that were thrown out of the boats, and with marvellous rapidity they were drawn up till they were high and dry.

"Ah, Harding, is that you?" said young Radford, addressing the smuggler, who had been steering the largest boat. "This is capitally managed. You are even earlier than I expected; and we shall get far into the country before daylight."

"We were obliged to use the sweeps, Sir," said Harding, bluntly; "but don't let 's talk. Get the things out, and load the horses; for we shall have to make two more trips back to the luggers before they are all cleared."

Everything was now bustle and activity; a number of bales and packages were taken out of the boats and placed upon the horses in one way or another, not always the most convenient to the poor animals; and as soon as Harding had made Mr. Radford count the number of the articles landed, the boats were launched off again to some larger vessels, which it seems were lying out at a little distance, though indiscernible in the fog.

Harding himself remained ashore; and turning to one or two of those about him, he asked, "What was all that red blaze I saw half over the country?"

"None of us can tell," answered young Radford. "The moment the fire at Tolsford was lighted, a dozen more were flaming up, all along to Dungeness."

"That's devilish strange!" said Harding. "It does not look well. — How many men have you got with you, Mr. Radford?"

"Why, well nigh upon two hundred," answered Ned Ramley, for his comrade.

"Ah, then you'll do," answered Harding, with a laugh; "but still you won't be the worse for some more. So I and some of the lads will see you safe across the Marsh. The Customs have got nothing at sea about here; so the boats will be safe enough."

"Thank you, Harding — thank you, Jack;" said several of the voices. "Once out of the Marsh, with all these ditches and things, and we shall do very well. How far are the luggers off?"

"Not a hundred fathom," answered Harding. "I would have run them ashore if there had been any capstan here to have drawn them up. But they won't be a minute, so have everything ready. Move off those horses that are loaded, a bit, my lads, and bring up the others."

Harding's minute, however, extended to nearly ten, and then the boats were again perceived approaching, and the same process was followed as before. The third trip was then made with equal success and ease. Not the slightest difficulty occurred, not the slightest obstruction was offered; the number of packages was declared to be complete, the horses were all loaded, and the party began to move off in a long line, across the Marsh, like a caravan threading the mazes of the desert.

Leaving a few men with the boats that were ashore, Harding and the rest of the seamen, with Mr. Radford, and several of his party, brought up the rear of the smugglers, talking over the events which had taken place, and the course of their farther proceedings. All seemed friendly and good-humoured; but there is such a thing as seeming, even amongst smugglers, and if Harding could have seen the real feelings of some of his companions towards him, it is very probable that he would not have given himself the trouble to accompany them on the way.

"I will pay you the money when I get to Bonnington," said young Radford, addressing his companion. "I can't very well get at it till I dismount."

"Oh, there's no matter for that, Sir," replied the smuggler. "Your father can pay me some other time. — But what are you going to Bonnington for? I should have thought your best way would have been by Bilsington, and so straight into the Weald. Then you would have had the woods round about you the greater part of the way; or I don't know that I might not have gone farther down still, and so by Orlestone."

"There's a party of dragoons at Bilsington," said young Radford, "and another at Ham Street."

"Ay, that alters the case," answered the smuggler; "but they are all so scattered about and so few, I should think they could do you no great harm. However, it will be best for you to go by Bonnington, if you are sure there are no troops there."

"If there are, we must fight: that's all," answered young Radford; and so ended the conversation for the time. One of those pauses of deep silence succeeded, which — by the accidental exhaustion of topics and the recurrence of the mind to the thoughts suggested by what has just passed — so frequently intervene in the conversation even of great numbers, whether occupied with light or serious subjects. How often do we find, amidst the gayest or the busiest assembly, a sudden stillness pervade the whole, and the ear may detect a pin fall. In the midst of the silence, however, Harding laid his hand upon young Radford's bridle, saying, in a low voice, "Hark! do you not hear the galloping of horses to the east there?"

The young man, on the first impulse, put his hand to his holster; but then withdrew it, and listened. "I think I do," he answered; "but now it has stopped."

"You are watched, I suspect," said Harding; "they did not seem many, however, and may be afraid to attack you. If I were you, I would put the men into a quicker pace; for these fellows may gather as they go. — If you had got such things with you as you could throw into the cuts, it would not much matter; for you could fight it out here, as well as elsewhere; but, if I understood your

father rightly, these goods would all be spoiled, and so the sooner you are out of the Marsh the better. Then you will be safe enough, if you are prudent. You may have to risk a shot or two; but that does not much matter."

"And what do you call prudent, Harding?" asked young Radford, in a wonderfully calm tone, considering his vehement temperament, and the excitement of the adventure in which he was engaged; "how would you have me act, when I do get out of the Marsh?"

"Why, that seems clear enough," replied the smuggler. "I would send all the goods and the men on foot, first, keeping along the straight road between the woods; and then, with all those who have got horses, I would hang behind a quarter of a mile or so, till the others had time to get on and disperse to the different hides, which ought to be done as soon as possible. Let a number drop off here, and a number there — one set to the willow cave, close by Woodchurch hill, another to the old Priory in the wood, and so on: you still keeping behind, and facing about upon the road, if you are pursued. If you do that, you are sure to secure the goods, or by far the greater part of them."

The advice was so good — as far as young Radford knew of the condition of the country, and the usual plan of operations which had hitherto been pursued by the Customs in their pursuit of smugglers — that he could offer no reasonable argument against it; but when prejudice has taken possession of a man's mind, it is a busy and skilful framer of suspicions; and he thought within his own breast, though he did not speak his intentions aloud, "No! Hang me if I leave the goods till I see them safe housed. This fellow may want to ruin us, by separating us into small parties."

The rest of the party had, by this time, resumed their conversation; and both Radford and Harding well knew that it would be vain to attempt to keep them quiet; for they were a rash and careless set, inclined to do everything with dash and swagger; and although, in the presence of actual and apparent danger, they could be induced to preserve some degree of order and discipline, and to show some obedience to their leaders, yet as soon as the

peril had passed away, or was no longer immediately before their eyes, they were like schoolboys in the master's absence, and careless of the consequences which they did not see. Twice Harding said, in a low voice, "I hear them again to the east, there!" and twice young Radford urged his men to a quicker pace; but many of them had come far; horses and men were tired; every one considered that, as the goods were safely landed, and no opposition shown, the battle was more than half won; and all forgot the warning of the day before, as man ever forgets the chastisements which are inflicted by Heaven for his good, and falls the next day into the very same errors, for the reproof of which they were sent.

"Now," said Harding, as they approached the spot where the Marsh road opened upon the highway to Bonnington, "spread some of your men out on the right and left, Mr. Radford, to keep you clear in case the enemy wish to make an attack. Your people can easily close in, and follow quickly, as soon as the rest have passed."

"If they do make an attack," thought young Radford, "your head shall be the first I send a ball through;" but the advice was too judicious to be neglected; and he accordingly gave orders to Ned Ramley and the Major, with ten men each, to go one or two hundred yards on the road towards Bilsington on the one hand, and Hurst on the other, and see that all was safe. A little confusion ensued, as was but natural in so badly disciplined a body; and in the meanwhile the laden horses advanced along the road straight into the heart of the country, while Richard Radford, with the greater part of his mounted men, paused to support either of his parties in case of attack. He said something in a low voice regarding the money, to Harding, who replied abruptly, "There — never mind about that; only look out, and get off as quickly as you can. You are safe enough now, I think; so good night."

Thus saying, he turned, and with the six or eight stout fellows who accompanied him, trod his way back into the Marsh. What passed through young Radford's brain at that moment it may be needless to dwell upon; but Harding escaped a peril that he little

dreamed of, solely by the risk of ruin to the whole scheme which a brawl at that spot and moment must have entailed.

The men who had been detached to the right, advanced along the road to the distance specified, proceeding slowly in the fog, and looking eagerly out before. "Look out," said Ned Ramley, at length, to one of his companions, taking a pistol from his belt at the same time, "I see men on horseback there, I think."

"Only trees in the fog," answered the other.

"Hush!" cried Ramley, sharply; but the other men were talking carelessly, and whether it was the sound of retreating horses or not, that he heard, he could not discover. After going on about three hundred yards, Ned Ramley turned, saying, "We had better go back now, and give warning; for I am very sure those were men I saw."

The other differed with him on that point; and, on rejoining Richard Radford, they found the Major and his party just come back from the Bilsington road, but with one man short. "That fellow," said the Major, "has taken himself off. I was sure he was a spy, so we had better go on as fast as possible. We shall have plenty of time before he can raise men enough to follow."

"There are others to the east, there," replied Ned Ramley. "I saw two or three, and there is no time to be lost, I say, or we shall have the whole country upon us. If I were you, Mr. Radford, I'd disperse in as small numbers as possible whenever we get to the Chequer-tree; and then if we lose a few of the things, we shall keep the greater part — unless, indeed, you are minded to stand it out, and have a fight upon the Green. We are enough to beat them all, I should think."

"Ay, Ned, that is the gallant way," answered Richard Radford; "but we must first see what is on before. We must not lose the goods, or risk them; otherwise nothing would please me better than to drub these dragoons; but in case it should be dark still when they come near us — if they do at all — we'll have a blow or two before we have done, I trust. However, let us forward now, for we must keep up well with the rest."

The party moved on at a quick pace, and soon overtook the

train of loaded horses, and men on foot, which had gone on before. Many a time a glance was given along the road behind, and many a time an attentive ear was turned listening for the sound of coming horse; but all was still and silent; and winding on through the thick woods, which at that time overspread all the country in the vicinity of their course, and covered their line of advance right and left, they began to lose the sense of danger, and to suppose that the sounds which had been heard, and the forms which had been seen, were but mere creations of the fancy.

About two miles from the border of Romney Marsh, the mist grew lighter, fading gradually away as the sea air mingled with the clearer atmosphere of the country. At times a star or two might be seen above; and though at that hour the moon gave no light, yet there was a certain degree of brightening in the sky which made some think they had miscalculated the hour, and that it was nearer the dawn than they imagined, while others contended that it was produced merely by the clearing away of the fog. At length, however, they heard a distant clock strike four. They were now at a spot where three or four roads branch off in different directions, at a distance of not more than half-a-mile from Chequer-tree, having a wide extent of rough, uncultivated land, called Aldington Freight, on their right, and part of the Priory wood on their left; and it yet wanted somewhat more than an hour to the actual rising of the sun. A consultation was then held; and, notwithstanding some differences of opinion, it was resolved to take the road by Stonecross Green, where they thought they could get information from some friendly cottagers, and thence through Gilbert's Wood towards Shaddoxhurst. At that point, they calculated that they could safely separate in order to convey the goods to the several *hides*, or places of concealment, which had been chosen beforehand.

At Stonecross Green, they paused again, and knocked hard at a cottage door, till they brought forth the sleepy tenant from his bed. But the intelligence gained from him was by no means satisfactory; he spoke of a large party of dragoons at Kingsnorth, and mentioned reports which had reached him of a small body having shown itself, at Bromley Green, late on the preceding

night; and it was consequently resolved, after much debate, to turn off before entering Gilbert's Wood, and, in some degree retreading their steps towards the Marsh, to make for Woodchurch beacon and thence to Redbrook Street. The distance was thus rendered greater, and both men and horses were weary; but the line of road proposed lay amidst a wild and thinly inhabited part of the country, where few hamlets or villages offered any quarters for the dragoons. They calculated, too, that having turned the dragoons who were quartered at Bilsington, they should thus pass between them and those at Kingsnorth and Bromley Green: and Richard Radford, himself, was well aware that there were no soldiers, when he left that part of the country, in the neighbourhood of High Halden or Bethersden. This seemed, therefore, the only road that was actually open before them; and it was accordingly taken, after a general distribution of spirits amongst the men, and of hay and water to the horses. Still their progress was slow, for the ground became hilly in that neighbourhood, and by the time they arrived at an elevated spot, near Woodchurch Beacon, whence they could see over a wide extent of country round, the grey light of the dawn was spreading rapidly through the sky, showing all the varied objects of the fair and beautiful land through which they wandered.

But it is now necessary to turn to another personage in our history, of whose fate, for some time, we have had no account.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE left our friend, Mr. Mowle, in no very pleasant situation; for although the generosity of the Major, in neither divulging the discovery he had made, to the rest of the smugglers, nor blowing the brains of the intruder out upon the spot, was, perhaps, much more than could be expected from a man in his situation and of his habits, yet it afforded no guarantee whatsoever to the unfortunate Custom-House officer, that his life would not be sacrificed on the very first danger or alarm. He also knew, that if such an accident were to happen again, as that which had at first displayed

his features to one of those into whose nocturnal councils he had intruded, nothing on earth could save him; for amongst the gang by whom he was surrounded, were a number of men who had sworn to shed his blood on the very first opportunity.

He walked along, therefore, as the reader may well conceive, with the feeling of a knife continually at his throat; and a long and weary march it seemed to him, as, proceeding by tortuous ways and zig-zag paths, the smugglers descended into Romney Marsh, and advanced rapidly towards Dymchurch. Mowle was, perhaps, as brave and daring a man as any that ever existed; but still the sensation of impending death can never be very pleasant to a person in strong health, and well-contented with the earth on which he is placed; and Mowle felt all the disagreeable points in his situation, exactly as any other man would do. It would not be just to him, however, were we not to state, that many other considerations crossed his mind, besides that of his own personal safety. The first of these was his duty to the department of government which he served; and many a plan suggested itself for making his escape here or there, in which he regarded the apprehension of the smugglers, and the seizure of the goods that they were going to escort into the country, fully as much as his own life.

His friend the Major, however, took means to frustrate all such plans, and seemed equally careful to prevent Mr. Mowle from effecting his object, and to guard against his being discovered by the other smugglers. At every turn and corner, at the crossing of every stream or cut, the Major was by his side; and yet once or twice he whispered a caution to him to keep out of the way of the lights, more especially as they approached Dymchurch. When they came near the shore, and a number of men with lanterns issued forth to aid them from the various cottages in the vicinity, he told Mowle to keep back with one party, consisting of hands brought out of Sussex, who were stationed in the rear with a troop of the horses. But at the same time Mowle heard his compassionate friend direct two of the men to keep a sharp eye upon him, as he was a stranger, of whom the leaders were not quite sure,

adding an injunction to blow his brains out at once, if he made the slightest movement without orders.

In the bustle and confusion which ensued, during the landing of the smuggled goods and the loading of the horses, Mowle once or twice encouraged a hope that something would favour his escape. But the two men strictly obeyed the orders they had received, remained close to his side during more than an hour and a half, which was consumed upon the beach, and never left him till he was rejoined by the Major, who told him to march on with the rest.

“What’s to come of this?” thought Mowle, as he proceeded, “and what can the fellow intend to do with me? — If he drags me along with them till daylight, one half of them will know me; and then the game’s up — and yet he can’t mean me harm, either. Well, I may have an opportunity of repaying him some day.”

When the party arrived at Bonnington, however, and, as we have already stated, two small bodies were sent off to the right and left, to reconnoitre the ground on either side, Mowle was one of those selected by the Major to accompany him on the side of Bilsington. But after having gone to the prescribed distance, without discovering anything to create suspicion, the worthy field-officer gave the order to return; and contriving to disentangle Mowle from the rest, he whispered in his ear, “Off with you as fast as you can, and take back by the Marsh, for if you give the least information, or bring the soldiers upon us, be you sure that some of us will find means to cut your throat. — Get on, get on fast!” he continued aloud, to the other men. “We’ve no time to lose;” and Mowle, taking advantage of the hurry and confusion of the moment, ran off towards Bilsington as fast as his legs could carry him.

“He’s off!” cried one of the men. “Shall I give him a shot?”

“No — no,” answered the Major, “it will only make more row. He’s more frightened than treacherous, I believe. I don’t think he’ll peach.”

Thus saying, he rejoined the main body of the smugglers, as we have seen; and Mowle hurried on his way without pause, run-

ning till he was quite out of breath. Now, the Major, in his parting speech to Mowle, though a shrewd man, had miscalculated his course, and mistaken the person with whom he had to deal. Had he put it to the Custom-House officer, as a matter of honour and generosity, not to inform against the person who had saved his life, poor Mowle would have been in a situation of great perplexity; but the threat which had been used, relieved him of half the difficulty. Not that he did not feel a repugnance to the task which duty pointed out — not that he did not ask himself, as soon as he had a moment to think of anything, “What ought I to do? How ought I to act?” But still the answer was, that his duty and his oath required him immediately to take steps for the pursuit and capture of the smugglers; and when he thought of the menace he said to himself, “No, no; if I don’t do what I ought, these fellows will only say that I was afraid.”

Having settled the matter in his own mind, he proceeded to execute his purpose with all speed, and hurried on towards Bilsington, where he knew there was a small party of dragoons, proposing to send off messengers immediately to the Colonel of the regiment and to all the different posts around. It was pitch dark, so that he did not perceive the first houses of the hamlet, till he was within a few yards of them; and all seemed still and quiet in the place. But after having passed the lane leading to the church, Mowle heard the stamping of some horses’ feet, and the next instant a voice exclaimed, “Stand! who goes there?”

“A friend!” answered Mowle. “Where’s the sergeant?”

“Here am I,” replied another voice. “Who are you?”

“My name is Mowle,” rejoined our friend, “the chief officer of Customs at Hythe.”

“Oh, come along, Mr. Mowle; you are just the man we want,” said the sergeant, advancing a step or two. “Captain Irby is up here, and would be glad to speak with you.”

Mowle followed in silence, having, indeed, some occasion to set his thoughts in order, and to recover his breath. About sixty or seventy yards farther on, a scene broke upon him, which somewhat surprised him; for, instead of a dozen dragoons at the most, he perceived, on turning the corner of the next cottage, a

body of at least seventy or eighty men, as well as he could calculate, standing each beside his horse, whose breath was seen mingling with the thick fog, by the light of a single lantern held close to the wall of the house which concealed the party from the Bonnington Road. Round that lantern were congregated three or four figures, besides that of the man who held it; and, fronting the approach, was a young gentleman,* dressed in the usual costume of a dragoon officer of that period. Before him stood another, apparently a private of the regiment; and the light shone full upon the faces of both, showing a cold, thoughtful, and inquiring look upon the countenance of the young officer, and anxious haste upon that of the inferior soldier.

"Here is Mr. Mowle, the chief officer, Captain," said the sergeant, as they advanced.

"Ha, that is fortunate!" replied Captain Irby. "Now we shall get at the facts, I suppose. Well, Mr. Mowle, what news?"

"Why, Sir, the cargo is landed," exclaimed Mowle, eagerly; "and the smugglers passed by Bonnington, up towards Chequer-tree, not twenty minutes ago."

"So this man says," rejoined Captain Irby, not the least in the world in haste. "Have you any fresh orders from the Colonel?"

"No, Sir; he said all his orders were given when last I saw him," replied the officer of Customs; "but if you move up quick towards Chequer-tree, you are sure to overtake them."

"How long is it since you saw Sir Henry?" demanded Captain Irby, without appearing to notice Mowle's suggestion.

"Oh, several hours ago," answered the Custom-House agent, somewhat provoked at the young officer's coolness. "I have been kept prisoner by the smugglers since ten o'clock — but that is

* It will be seen that I have represented all my officers as young men, even up to the very Colonel of the regiment; but it must be remembered, that, in those days, promotion in the service was regulated in a very different manner from the present system. I remember a droll story, of a visitor at a nobleman's house, inquiring of the butler what was the cause of an obstreperous roaring he heard up stairs, when the servant replied, "Oh, Sir, it is nothing but the little general crying for his pap."

nothing to the purpose, Sir. If you would catch the smugglers, you have nothing for it but to move up to Chequer-tree after them; and that is what I require you to do."

"I have my orders," answered the Captain of the troop, with a smile at the impetuous tone of the Custom-House officer, "and if you bring me none later, those I shall obey, Mr. Mowle."

"Well, Sir, you take the responsibility upon yourself, then," said Mowle; "I have expressed my opinion, and what I require at your hands."

"The responsibility will rest where it ought," replied Captain Irby, "on the shoulders of him whom I am bound to obey. For your opinion I am obliged to you, but it cannot be followed; and as to what you require, I am under superior authority, which supersedes your requisition."

He then said a word or two to one of the men beside him, who immediately proceeded to the body of men behind; but all that Mowle could hear was "Snave" and "Brenzet," repeated once or twice, with some mention of Woodchurch and the road by Red Brooke Street. The order was then given to mount, and march; and Mowle remarked that four troopers rode off at a quick pace before the rest.

"Now, Mr. Mowle, we shall want you with us if you please," said Captain Irby, in a civil tone. "Where is your horse?"

"Horse!—I have got none;" answered the officer of Customs, a good deal piqued; "did I not say that I have been a prisoner with the smugglers for the last five hours? and as to my going with you, Sir, I see no use I can be of, if you do not choose to do what I require, or follow my advice."

"Oh, the greatest — the greatest!" replied the young officer, without losing his temper for an instant, "and as to a horse, we will soon supply you."

An order was immediately given; and in three minutes the horse of a dragoon officer, fully caparisoned, was led up to Mowle's side, who, after a moment's hesitation, mounted, and rode on with the troop. It must not be denied that he was anything but satisfied, not alone because he thought that he was not treated with sufficient deference — although, having for years been accus-

tomed to be obeyed implicitly by the small parties of dragoons which had been previously sent down to aid the Customs, it did seem to him very strange that his opinions should go for nought—but also because he feared that the public service would suffer, and that the obstinacy, as he called it, of the young officer, would enable the smugglers to escape. Still more was his anxiety and indignation raised, when he perceived the slow pace at which the young officer proceeded, and that instead of taking the road which he had pointed out, the party kept the Priory Wood on the right hand, bearing away from Chequer-tree, to which he had assured himself that Richard Radford and his party were tending.

He saw that many precautions were taken, however, which, attributing them at first to a design of guarding against surprise, he thought quite unnecessary. Two dragoons were thrown forward at a considerable distance before the head of the troop; a single private followed about twenty yards behind them; two more succeeded, and then another, and last came Captain Irby himself, keeping Mr. Mowle by his side. From time to time a word was passed down from those who led the advance, not shouted—but spoken in a tone only loud enough to be heard by the trooper immediately behind; and this word, for a considerable way, was merely “All clear!”

At length, just at the end of the Priory Wood, where a path, coming from the east, branched off towards Aldington Freight, and two roads went away to the north and west, the order to halt was given, to the surprise and consternation of Mr. Mowle, who conceived that the escape of the smugglers must be an inevitable result. At length a new word was passed from the head of the line, which was, “On before.” But still the Captain of the troop gave no command to march, and the soldiers sat idle on their horses for a quarter of an hour longer. Mowle calculated that it must now be at least half past four or five o’clock. He thought he perceived the approach of day; and though, in discontented silence, he ventured to say no more, he would have given all he had in the world to have had the command of the troop for a couple of hours.

His suspense and anxiety were brought to an end at length; for just as he was assured, by the greyness of the sky, that the

sun would soon rise, a trooper came dashing down the right-hand path at full speed, and Captain Irby spurred on to meet him. What passed between them Mowle could not hear; but the message was soon delivered, the soldier rode back to the east, by the way he came, and the order to march was immediately given. Instead, however, of taking the road to Stonecross, the troop directed its course to the west, but at a somewhat quicker pace than before. Still a word was passed back from the head of the line; and, after a short time, the troop was put into a quick trot, Captain Irby sometimes endeavouring to lead his companion into general conversation upon any indifferent subject, but not once alluding to the expedition on which they were engaged. Poor Mowle was too anxious to talk much. He did not at all comprehend the plan upon which the young officer was acting; but yet he began to see that there was some plan in operation, and he repeated to himself more than once, "There must be something in it, that's clear; but he might as well tell me what it is, I think."

At length he turned frankly round to his companion, and said, "I see you are going upon some scheme, Captain. I wish to Heaven you would tell me what it is; for you can't imagine how anxious I am about this affair."

"My good friend," replied Captain Irby, "I know no more of the matter than you do; so I can tell you nothing about it. I am acting under orders; and the only difference between you and I is, that you, not being accustomed to do so, are always puzzling yourself to know what it all means, while I, being well drilled to such things, do not trouble my head about it; but do as I am told, quite sure that it will all go right."

"Heaven send it!" answered Mowle; "but here it is broad day-light, and we seem to be going farther and farther from our object every minute."

As if in answer to his last observation, the word was again passed down from the front, "On, before!" and Captain Irby immediately halted his troop for about five minutes. At the end of that time, the march was resumed, and shortly after the whole body issued out upon the side of one of the hills, a few miles from Woodchurch.

The sun was now just risen — the east was glowing with all the hues of early day — the mist was dispersed or left behind in the neighbourhood of the Marsh; and a magnificent scene, all filled with golden light, spread out beneath the eyes of the Custom-House officer. But he had other objects to contemplate much more interesting to him than the beauties of the landscape. About three-quarters of a mile in advance, and in the low ground to the north-west of the hill on which he stood, appeared a dark, confused mass of men and horses, apparently directing their course towards Tiffenden; and Mowle's practised eye instantly perceived that they were the smugglers. At first sight he thought, "They may escape us yet:" but following the direction in which Captain Irby's glance was turned, he saw, further on, in the open fields towards High Halden, a considerable body of horse, whose regular line at once showed them to be a party of the military. Then turning towards the little place on his left, called Cuckoo Point, he perceived, at the distance of about a mile, another troop of dragoons, who must have marched, he thought, from Brenzet and Appledore.

The smugglers seemed to become aware, nearly at the same moment, of the presence of the troops on the side of High Halden; for they were observed to halt, to pause for a minute or two, then re-tread their steps for a short distance, and take their way over the side of the hill, as if tending towards Plurenden or Little Ingham.

"You should cut them off, Sir — you should cut them off!" cried Mowle, addressing Captain Irby, "or, by Jove, they'll be over the hill above Brook Street; and then we shall never catch them, amongst all the woods and copses up there. They'll escape, to a certainty!"

"I think not, if I know my man," answered Captain Irby, coolly; "and, at all events, Mr. Mowle, I must obey my orders. — But there he comes over the hill; so that matter's settled. Now let them get out if they can. — You have heard of a rat-trap, Mr. Mowle?"

Mowle turned his eyes in the direction of an opposite hill, about three-quarters of a mile distant from the spot where he him-

self stood, and there, coming up at a rapid pace, appeared an officer in a plain grey cloak, with two or three others in full regimentals, round him, while a larger body of cavalry than any he had yet seen, met his eyes, following their commander about fifty yards behind, and gradually crowning the summit of the rise, where they halted. The smugglers could not be at more than half a mile's distance from this party, and the moment that it appeared, the troops from the side of High Halden and from Cuckoo Point began to advance at a quick trot, while Captain Irby descended into the lower ground more slowly, watching, with a small glass that he carried in his hand, the motions of all the other bodies, when the view was not cut off by the hedge-rows and copses, as his position altered. Mowle kept his eyes upon the body of smugglers, and upon the dragoons on the opposite hill, and he soon perceived a trooper ride down from the latter group to the former, as if bearing them some message.

The next instant, there was a flash or two, as if the smugglers had fired upon the soldier sent to them; and then, retreating slowly towards a large white house, with some gardens and shrubberies and various outbuildings around it, they manifested a design of occupying the grounds with the intention of there resisting the attack of the cavalry. A trooper instantly galloped down, at full speed, towards Captain Irby, making him a sign with his hand as he came near; and the troop with whom Mowle had advanced instantly received the command to charge, while the other, from the hill, came dashing down with headlong speed towards the confused multitude below.

The smugglers were too late in their manœuvre. Embarrassed with a large quantity of goods and a number of men on foot; they had not time to reach the shelter of the garden walls, before the party of dragoons from the hill was amongst them. But still they resisted with fierce determination, formed with some degree of order, gave the troopers a sharp discharge of fire-arms as they came near, and fought hand to hand with them, even after being broken by their charge.

The greater distance which Captain Irby had to advance, prevented his troop from reaching the scene of strife for a minute or

two after the others; but their arrival spread panic and confusion amongst the adverse party; and after a brief and unsuccessful struggle, in the course of which, one of the dragoons was killed, and a considerable number wounded, nothing was thought of amongst young Radford's band, but how to escape in the presence of such a force. The goods were abandoned — all those men who had horses were seen galloping over the country in different directions; and if any fugitive paused, it was but to turn and fire a shot at one of the dragoons in pursuit. Almost every one of the men on foot was taken ere half an hour was over; and a number of those on horseback were caught and brought back, some desperately wounded. Several were left dead, or dying, on the spot where the first encounter had taken place; and amongst the former, Mowle, with feelings of deep regret, almost approaching remorse, beheld, as he rode up towards the Colonel of the regiment, the body of his friend, the Major, shot through the head by a pistol-ball. Men of the Custom-House officer's character, however, soon console themselves for such things; and Mowle, as he rode on, thought to himself, "After all, it's just as well! He would only have been hanged — so he's had an easier death."

The young officer in the command of the regiment of dragoons was seated on horseback, upon the top of a little knoll, with some six or seven persons immediately around him, while two groups of soldiers, dismounted, and guarding a number of prisoners, appeared a little in advance. Amongst those nearest to the Colonel, Mowle remarked his companion, Birchett, who was pointing, with a discharged pistol, across the country, and saying, "There he goes, Sir, there he goes! I'll swear that is he, on the strong grey horse. I fired at him — I'm sure I must have hit him."

"No, you didn't, Sir," answered a sergeant of dragoons, who was busily tying a handkerchief round his own wounded arm. "Your shot went through his hat."

The young officer fixed his eyes keenly upon the road leading to Harbourne, where a man, on horseback, was seen galloping away, at full speed, with four or five of the soldiers in pursuit.

"Away after him, Sergeant Miles," he said; "take straight

across the country, with six men of Captain Irby's troop. They are fresher. If you make haste you will cut him off at the corner of the wood; or if he takes the road through it, in order to avoid you, leave a couple of men at Tiffenden corner, and round by the path to the left. The distance will be shorter for you, and you will stop him at Mrs. Clare's cottage — a hundred guineas to any one who brings him in."

His orders were immediately obeyed; and, without noticing Mowle, or any one else, the Colonel continued to gaze after the little party of dragoons, as, dashing on at the utmost speed of their horses, they crossed an open part of the ground in front, keeping to the right hand of the fugitive, and threatening to cut him off from the north side of the country, towards which he was decidedly tending. Whether, if he had been able to proceed at the same rate at which he was then going, they would have been successful in their efforts or not, is difficult to say; for his horse, though tired, was very powerful, and chosen expressly for its fleetness. But in a flight and pursuit like that, the slightest accident will throw the advantage on the one side or the other; and unfortunately for the fugitive, his horse stumbled, and came upon its knees. It was up again in a moment, and went on, though somewhat more slowly; and the young officer observed, in a low tone, "They will have him. — It is of the utmost importance that he should be taken. — Ah! Mr. Mowle, is that you? Why, we have given you up for these many hours. We have been successful, you see; and yet, but half successful either, if their leader gets away. — You are sure of the person, Mr. Birchett?"

"Perfectly, Sir," answered the officer of Customs. "I was as near to him, at one time, as I am now to you; and Mr. Mowle here, too, will tell you I know him well."

"Who, — young Radford?" asked Mowle. "Oh yes, that we all do; and besides, I can tell you, that is he on the grey horse, for I was along with him the greater part of last night." And Mowle proceeded to relate succinctly all that had occurred to him from ten o'clock on the preceding evening.

The young officer, in the meanwhile, continued to follow the

soldiers with his eyes, commenting, by a brief word or two, on the various turns taken by the pursuit.

"He is cut off," he said, in a tone of satisfaction; "the troops, from Halden, will stop him there. — He is turning to the left, as if he would make for Tenterden. — Captain Irby, be so good as to detach a corporal, with as many men as you can spare, to cut him off by Gallows Green — on the left-hand road, there. Bid them use all speed. Now he's for Harbourne again! He'll try to get through the wood; but Miles will be before him."

He then applied himself to examine the state of his own men and the prisoners, and paid every humane attention to both, doing the best that he could for their wounds, in the absence of surgical assistance, and ordering carts to be procured from the neighbouring farms, to carry those most severely injured into the village of Woodchurch. The smuggled goods he consigned to the charge of the Custom-House officers, giving them, however, a strong escort, at their express desire; although, he justly observed, that there was but little chance of any attempt being made by the smugglers to recover what they had lost.

"I shall now, Mr. Mowle," he continued, "proceed to Woodchurch, and remain there for a time, to see what other prisoners are brought in, and make any farther arrangements that may be necessary; but I shall be in Hythe, in all probability, before night. The custody of the prisoners I shall take upon myself for the present, as the civil power is evidently not capable of guarding them."

"Well, Sir, you have made a glorious day's work of it," answered Mowle, "that I must say; and I'm sure if you like to establish your quarters, for the morning, at Mr. Croyland's there, on just before, he will make you heartily welcome; for he hates smugglers as much as any one."

The young officer shook his head, saying, "No, I will go to Woodchurch."

But he gazed earnestly at the house for several minutes, before he turned his horse towards the village; and then, leaving the minor arrangements to be made by the inferior officers, he rode slowly and silently away.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE must turn, dear reader, to other persons and to other scenes, but still keep to that eventful day when the smugglers, who had almost fancied themselves lords of Kent, first met severe discomfiture at the hands of those sent to suppress their illicit traffic. Many small parties had before been defeated, it is true; many a cargo of great value, insufficiently protected, had been seized. Such, indeed, had been the case with the preceding venture of Richard Radford; and such had been, several times, the result of overweening confidence; but the free-traders of Kent had still, more frequently, been successful in their resistance of the law; and they had never dreamed that in great numbers, and with every precaution and care to boot, they could be hemmed in and overpowered, in a country with every step of which they were well acquainted. They had now, however, been defeated, as I have said, for the first time, in a complete and conclusive manner, after every precaution had been taken, and when every opportunity had been afforded them of trying their strength with the dragoons, as they had often boastfully expressed a wish to do.

But we must now leave them, and turn to the interior of the house near which the strife took place. Nay, more, we must enter a fair lady's chamber, and watch her as she lies, during the night of which we have already given so many scenes, looking for awhile into her waking thoughts and slumbering dreams; for that night passed in a strange mingling of sleepless fancies and of drowsy visions.

Far from me to encourage weak and morbid sensibilities, or to represent life as a dream of sickly feelings, or a stage for the action of ill-regulated passions; — it is a place of duty and of action, of obedience to the rule of the one great guide, of endeavour, and, alas, of trial! — But still human beings are not mere machines: there is still something within this frame-work of dust and ashes, besides, and very different from, the bones and muscles, the veins and nerves, of which it is composed; and Heaven forbid that it should not be so! There are still loves and affections, sympathies

and regards, associations and memories, and all the linked sweetness of that strange harmonious whole, where the spirit and the matter, the soul and the body, blended in mysterious union, act on each other, and reciprocate, by every sense and every perception, new sources of pain or of delight. The forms and conventionalities of society, the habits of the age in which we live, the force of education, habit, example, may, in very many cases, check the outward show of feeling, and in some, perhaps, wear down to nothing the reality. But still how many a bitter heart-ache lies concealed beneath the polished brow and smiling lip; how many a bright aspiration, how many a tender hope, how many a passionate throb, hides itself from the eyes of others — from the foreigners of the heart — under an aspect of gay merriment or of cold indifference. The silver services of the world are all, believe me, but of plated goods, and the brightest ornaments that deck the table or adorn the saloon but of silver-gilt.

Could we — as angels may be supposed to do — stand by the bed-side of many a fair girl who has been laughing through an evening of apparent merriment, and look through the fair bosom into the heart beneath, see all the feelings that thrill therein, or trace even the visions that chequer slumber, what should we behold? Alas! how strange a contrast to the beaming looks and gladsome smiles which have marked the course of the day. How often would be seen the bitter repining; the weary sickness of the heart; the calm, stern grief; the desolation; the despair — forming a black and gloomy background to the bright seeming of the hours of light. How often, in the dream, should we behold “the lost, the loved, the dead, too many, yet how few,” rise up before memory in those moments, when not only the shackles and the handcuffs of the mind, imposed by the tyrant uses of society, are cast off, but also when the softer bands are loosened, which the waking spirit places upon unavailing regrets and aspirations all in vain — in those hours, when memory, and imagination, and feeling are awake, and when judgment, and reason, and resolution are all buried in slumber.

Can it be well for us thus to check the expression of all the deeper feelings of the heart — to shut out all external sympathies —

to lock within the prison of the heart its brightest treasures like the miser's gold, and only to give up to them the hours of solitude and of slumber? — I know not; and the question, perhaps, is a difficult one to solve: but such, however, are the general rules of society; and to its rules we are slaves and bondsmen.

It was to her own chamber that Edith Croyland usually carried her griefs and memories; and even in the house of her uncle, though she was aware how deeply he loved her, she could not, or she would not, venture to speak of her sensations as they really arose.

On the eventful day of young Radford's quarrel with Sir Edward Digby, Edith retired at the sober hour at which the whole household of Mr. Croyland usually sought repose; but there, for a considerable time, she meditated as she had often meditated before, on the brief intelligence she had received on the preceding day. "He is living," she said to herself: "he is in England, and yet he seeks me not! But my sister says he loves me still! — It is strange, it is very strange. He must have greatly changed. So eager, so impetuous as he used to be, to become timid, cautious, reserved, — never to write, never to send. — And yet why should I blame him? What has he not met with from mine, if not from me? What has his love brought upon himself and his? The ruin of his father — a parent's suffering and death — the destruction of his own best prospects — a life of toil and danger, and expulsion from the scenes in which his bright and early days were spent! — Why should I wonder that he does not come back to a spot where every object must be hateful to him? — why should I wonder that he does not seek me, whose image can never be separated from all that is painful and distressing to him in memory? Poor Henry! Oh, that I could cheer him, and wipe away the dark and gloomy recollections of the past."

Such were some of her thoughts ere she lay down to rest; and they pursued her still, long after she had sought her pillow, keeping her waking for some hours. At length, not long before day-break, sleep took possession of her brain; but it was not untroubled sleep. Wild and whirling images for some time supplied the place of thought; but they were all vague, and confused, and

undefined for a considerable length of time after sleep had closed her eyes, and she forgot them as soon as she awoke. But at length a vision of more tangible form presented itself, which remained impressed upon her memory. In it, the events of the day mingled with those both of the former and the latter years, undoubtedly in strange and disorderly shape, but still bearing a sufficient resemblance to reality to show whence they were derived. The form of young Radford, bleeding and wounded, seemed before her eyes; and with one hand clasped tightly round her wrist, he seemed to drag her down into a grave prepared for himself. Then she saw Sir Edward Digby with a naked sword in his hand, striving in vain to cut off the arm that held her, the keen blade passing through and through the limb of the phantom without dissevering it from the body, or relaxing its hold upon herself. Then the figure of her father stood before her, clad in a long mourning cloak, and she heard his voice crying, in a dark and solemn tone, "Down, down, both of you, to the grave that you have dug for me!" The next instant the scene was crowded with figures, both on horseback and on foot. Many a countenance which she had seen and known at different times was amongst them; and all seemed urging her on down into the gulf before her; till suddenly appeared, at the head of a bright and glittering troop, he whom she had so long and deeply loved, as if advancing at full speed to her rescue. She called loudly to him; she stretched out her hand towards him, and onward he came through the throng till he nearly reached her. Then in an instant her father interposed again and pushed him back. All became a scene of disarray and confusion, as if a general battle had been taking place around her. Swords were drawn, shots were fired, wounds were given and received; there were cries of agony and loud words of command, till at length, in the midst, her lover reached her; his arms were cast round her; she was pressed to his bosom; and with a start, and mingled feelings of joy and terror, Edith's dream came to an end.

Daylight was pouring into her room through the tall window; but yet she could hardly persuade herself that she was not dreaming still; for many of the sounds which had transmitted such

strange impressions to her mind, still rang in her ears. She heard shots and galloping horse, and the loud word of command; and after pausing for an instant or two, she sprang up, cast something over her, and ran to the window.

It was a bright and beautiful morning; and the room which she occupied looked over Mr. Croyland's garden wall to the country beyond. But underneath that garden wall was presented a scene, such as Edith had never before witnessed. Before her eyes, mingled in strange confusion with a group of men who, from their appearance, she judged to be smugglers, were a number of the royal dragoons; and, though pistols were discharged on both sides, and even long guns on the part of the smugglers, the use of fire-arms was too limited to produce sufficient smoke to obscure the view. Swords were out, and used vehemently; and on running her eye over the mass before her, she saw a figure that strongly brought back her thoughts to former days. Directing the operations of the troops, seldom using the sword which he carried in his own hand, yet mingling in the thickest of the fray, appeared a tall and powerful young man, mounted on a splendid charger, but only covered with a plain grey cloak.

The features she could scarcely discern; but there was something in the form and in the bearing, that made Edith's heart beat vehemently, and caused her to raise her voice to Heaven in murmured prayer. The shots were flying thick: one of them struck the sun-dial in the garden, and knocked a fragment off; but still she could not withdraw herself from the window; and with eager and anxious eyes she continued to watch the fight, till another body of dragoons swept up, and the smugglers, apparently struck with panic, abandoned resistance, and were soon seen flying in every direction over the ground.

One man, mounted on a strong grey horse, passed close beneath the garden wall; and in him Edith instantly recognised young Richard Radford. That sight made her draw back again for a moment from the window, lest he should recognise her; but the next instant she looked out again, and then beheld the officer whom she had seen commanding the dragoons, stretching out his hand and arm in the direction which the fugitive had taken, as if

giving orders for his pursuit. She watched him with feelings indescribable, and saw him more than once turn his eyes towards the house where she was, and gaze on it long and thoughtfully.

"Can he know whose dwelling this is?" she asked herself; "can he know who is in it, and yet ride away?" But so it was. After he had remained on the ground for about half an hour, she saw him depart, turning his horse's head slowly towards Woodchurch; and Edith withdrew from the window, and wept.

Her eyes were dry, however, and her manner calm, when she went down to breakfast; and she heard unmoved, from her uncle, the details of the skirmish which had taken place between the smugglers and the military.

"This must be a tremendous blow to them," said Mr. Croyland; "the goods are reported to be of immense value, and the whole of them are stated to have been run by that old infernal villain, Radford. I am glad that this has happened, trebly — *felix ter et amplius*, my dear Edith; first, that a trade which enriches scoundrels to the detriment of the fair and lawful merchant, has received nearly its death-blow; secondly, that these audacious vagabonds, who fancied they had all the world at their command, and that they could do as they pleased in Kent, have been taught how impotent they are against a powerful hand and a clear head; and, thirdly, that the most audacious vagabond of them all, who has amassed a large fortune by defiance of the law, and by a system which embodies cheatery with robbery — I mean robbery of the revenue with cheatery of the lawful merchant — has been the person to suffer. I have heard a great deal of forcing nations to abate their Customs dues, by smuggling in despite of them; but depend upon it, whoever advocates such a system is — I will not say, either a rogue or a fool, as some rash and intemperate persons might say — but a man with very queer notions of morals, my dear. I dare say, the fellows' firing awoke you, my love. You look pale, as if you had been disturbed."

Edith replied, simply, that she had been roused by the noise, but did not enter into any particulars, though she saw, or fancied she saw, an inquiring look upon her uncle's face as he spoke.

During the morning many were the reports and anecdotes

brought in by the servants, regarding the encounter, which had taken place so close to the house; and all agreed that never had so terrible a disaster befallen the smugglers. Their bands were quite broken up, it was said, their principal leaders taken or killed, and the amount of the smuggled goods which — with the usual exaggeration of rumour — was raised to three or four hundred thousand pounds, was universally reported to be the loss of Mr. Radford. His son had been seen by many in command of the party of contraband traders; and it was clear that he had fled to conceal himself, in fear of the very serious consequences which were likely to ensue.

Mr. Croyland rubbed his hands: "I will mark this day in the calendar with a white stone!" he said. "Seldom, my dear Edith, very seldom, do so many fortunate circumstances happen together; a party of atrocious vagabonds discomfited and punished as they deserve; the most audacious rogue of the whole stripped of his ill-gotten wealth; and a young ruffian, who has long bullied and abused the whole county, driven from that society in which he never had any business. This young officer, this Captain Osborn, must be a very clever, as well as a very gallant fellow."

"Captain Osborn!" murmured Edith; "were they commanded by Captain Osborn?"

"Yes, my dear," answered the old gentleman; "I saw him myself over the garden wall. I know him, my love; I have been introduced to him. Didn't you hear me say, he is coming to spend a few days with me?"

Edith made no reply; but somewhat to her surprise, she heard her uncle, shortly after, order his carriage to be at the door at half-past twelve. He gave his fair niece no invitation to accompany him; and Edith prepared to amuse herself during his absence as best she might. She calculated, indeed, upon that which, to a well-regulated mind, is almost always either a relief or a pleasure, though too often a sad one: the spending of an hour or two in solitary thought. But all human calculations are vain; and so were those of poor Edith Croyland. For the present, however, we must leave her to her fate, and follow her good uncle, Zachary, on his expedition to Woodchurch, whither, as doubtless the reader

has anticipated, his steps, or rather those of his coach horses, were turned, just as the hands of the clock in the vestibule pointed to a quarter to one.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DURING the whole forenoon of the 3rd of September, the little village of Woodchurch presented a busy and bustling, though, in truth, it could not be called a gay scene. The smart dresses of the dragoons, the number of men and horses, the soldiers riding quickly along the road from time to time, the occasional sound of the trumpet, the groups of villagers and gaping children, all had an animating effect; but there was, mingled with the other sights which the place presented, quite a sufficient portion of human misery, in various forms, to sadden any but a very unfeeling heart. For some time after the affray was over, every ten minutes, was seen to roll in one of the small, narrow carts of the country, half filled with straw, and bearing a wounded man, or at most, two. In the same manner, several corpses, also, were carried in; and the number of at least fifty prisoners, in separate detachments, with hanging hands and pinioned arms, were marched slowly through the street to the houses which had been marked out as affording the greatest security.

The good people of Woodchurch laughed and talked freely with the dragoons, made many inquiries concerning the events of the skirmish, and gave every assistance to the wounded soldiers; but it was remarked with surprise, by several of the officers, that they showed no great sympathy with the smugglers, either prisoners or wounded—gazed upon the parties who were brought in with an unfriendly air, and turning round to each other, commented, in low tones, with very little appearance of compassion.

“Ay, that’s one of the Ramleys’ gang,” said the stout blacksmith of the place, to his friend and neighbour, the wheelwright, as some ten or twelve men passed before them with their wrists tied.

“And that fellow in the smart green coat is another,” rejoined the wheelwright; “he’s the man who, I dare say, ham-stringed my mare, because I wouldn’t let them have her for the last run.”

“That ’s Tom Angel,” observed the blacksmith; “he ’s to be married to Jinny Ramley, they say.”

“He ’ll be married to a halter first, I ’ve a notion,” answered the wheelwright, “and then instead of an angel he ’ll make a devil! He ’s one of the worst of them, bad as they all are. A pretty gaol delivery we shall have at the next ’Sizes!”

“A good county delivery, too,” replied the blacksmith; “as men have been killed, it ’s felony, that ’s clear: so hemp will be dear, Mr. Slatterly.”

By the above conversation the feelings of the people of Woodchurch towards the smugglers, at that particular time, may be easily divined; but the reader must not suppose that they were influenced alone by the very common tendency of men’s nature to side with the winning party; for such was not altogether the case, though, perhaps, they would not have ventured to show their dislike to the smugglers so strongly, had they been more successful. As long as the worthy gentlemen, who had now met with so severe a reverse, had contented themselves with merely running contraband articles — even as long as they had done nothing more than take a man’s horse for their own purposes, without his leave, or use his premises, whether he liked it or not, as a place of concealment for their smuggled goods, they were not only indifferent, but even friendly; for man has always a sufficient portion of the adventurer at his heart to have a fellow feeling for all his brethren engaged in rash and perilous enterprises. But the smugglers had grown insolent and domineering from long success; they had not only felt themselves lords of the county, but had made others feel it often in an insulting, and often in a cruel and brutal manner. Crimes of a very serious character had been lately committed by the Ramleys and others, which, though not traced home by sufficient evidence to satisfy the law, were fixed upon them by the general voice of the people; and the threats of terrible vengeance which they sometimes uttered against all who opposed them, and the boastful tone in which they indulged, when speaking of their most criminal exploits, probably gained them credit for much more wickedness than they really committed.

Thus their credit with the country people was certainly on the

decline when they met with the disaster which has been lately recorded; and their defeat and dispersion was held by the inhabitants of Woodchurch as an augury of better times, when their women would be able to pass from village to village, even after dusk, in safety and free from insult, and their cattle might be left out in the fields all night, without being injured, either by wantonness, or in lawless uses. It will be understood, that in thus speaking, I allude alone to the land smugglers, a race altogether different from their fellow labourers of the sea, whom the people looked upon with a much more favourable eye, and who, though rash and daring men enough, were generally a good humoured free-hearted body, spending the money that they had gained at the peril of their lives or their freedom, with a liberal hand and in a kindly spirit.

Almost every inhabitant of Woodchurch had some cause of complaint against the Ramleys' gang; and, to say the truth, Mr. Radford himself was by no means popular in the county. A selfish and a cunning man is almost always speedily found out by the lower classes, even when he makes an effort to conceal it. But Mr. Radford took no such trouble; for he gloried in his acuteness; and if he had chosen a motto, it probably would have been "Every man for himself." His selfishness, too, took several of the most offensive forms. He was ostentatious; he was haughty; and, on the strength of riches acquired, every one knew how, he looked upon himself as a very great man, and treated all the inferior classes, except those of whom he had need, to use their own expression, "as dirt under his feet." All the villagers, therefore, were well satisfied to think that he had met with a check at last; and many of the good folks of Woodchurch speculated upon the probability of two or three, out of so great a number of prisoners, giving such evidence as would bring that worthy gentleman within the gripe of the law.

Such were the feelings of the people of that place, as well as those of many a neighbouring village; and the scene presented by the captive and wounded smugglers, as they were led along, was viewed with indifference by some, and with pleasure by others. Two or three of the women, indeed, bestowed kindly attention

upon the wounded men, moved by that beautiful compassion which is rarely if ever wanting, in a female heart; but the male part of the population took little share, if any, in such things, and were quite willing to aid the soldiers in securing the prisoners, till they could be marched off to prison.

The first excitement had subsided before noon, but still, from time to time, some little bustle took place — a prisoner was caught and brought in, and carried to the public-house where the Colonel had established himself — an orderly galloped through the street — messengers came and went; and four or five soldiers, with their horses ready saddled, remained before the door of the inn, ready, at a moment's notice, for any event. The commanding officer did not appear at all beyond the doors of his temporary abode; but continued writing, giving orders, examining the prisoners, and those who brought them, in the same room which he had entered when first he arrived. As few of the people of the place had seen him, a good deal of curiosity was excited by his quietness and reserve. It was whispered amongst the women, that he was the handsomest man ever seen; and the men said he was a very fine fellow, and ought to be made a general of. The barmaid communicated to her intimate friends, that when he took off his cloak, she had seen a star upon the breast of his coat; and that her master seemed to know more of him, if he liked to tell; but the landlord was as silent as a mouse.

These circumstances, however, kept up a little crowd before the entrance of the inn, consisting of persons anxious to behold the hero of the day; and just at the hour of two, the carriage of Mr. Croyland rolled in, through the people, at the usual slow and deliberate pace to which that gentleman accustomed his carriage horses.

The large heavy door of the large heavy vehicle, was opened by the two servants who accompanied it; and out stepped Mr. Croyland, with his back as straight and stiff as a poker, and his gold-headed cane in his hand. The landlord, at the sight of an equipage, which he well knew, came out in haste, bowing low, and welcoming Mr. Croyland in the hearty good old style. The nabob himself unbent a little to his friend of the inn, and after asking

him how he did, and bestowing a word or two on the state of the weather, proceeded to say, "And now, Miles, I wish to speak a word or two with Captain Osborn, who is in your house, I believe."

"No, Mr. Croyland," replied the landlord, looking at the visitor with some surprise, "the Captain is not here. He is down at Nelly South's, and his name's not Osborn, either, but Irby."

"Then, who the deuce have you got here, with all these soldiers about the door?" demanded Mr. Croyland.

"The Colonel of the regiment, Sir," answered Miles; "there has only been one Captain here all day; and that's Captain Irby."

"Not right of the lad — not right of the lad!" exclaimed Mr. Croyland, rather testily; "no one should keep a man waiting, especially an old man, and more especially still, a cross old man. But I'll come in and stop a bit; for I want to see the young gentleman. Where the devil did he go to, I wonder, after the skirmish? — Halloo, you Sir, corporal! Pray, Sir, what's your officer's name?"

The man put up his hand in military fashion, and, with a strong Hibernian accent, demanded, "Is it the Colonel you're inquiring about, Sir? Why, then, his name is Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Layton, Knight of the Bath — and mighty cold weather it was, too, when he got the Bath; so I didn't envy him his ducking."

"Oh ho!" said Mr. Croyland, putting his finger sagaciously to the side of his nose; "be so good as to send up that card to Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Layton, Knight of the Bath, and tell him that the gentleman whose appellation it bears is here, inquiring for one Captain Osborn whom he once saw."

The corporal took the card himself to the top of the stairs, and delivered the message, with as much precision as his intellect could muster, to some person who seemed to be waiting on the outside of a door above. "Why, you fool!" cried a voice, immediately, "I told you, if Mr. Croyland came, to show him up. Sir Henry will see him." And immediately a servant, in plain clothes, descended to perform his function himself.

"Very grand!" murmured Mr. Croyland, as he followed.

The door above was immediately thrown open, and his name announced; but, walking slowly, he had not entered the room before the young officer, who has more than once been before the reader's eyes, was half across the floor to meet him. He was now dressed in full uniform; and certainly a finer or more commanding-looking man had seldom, if ever, met Mr. Croyland's view. Advancing with a frank and pleasant smile, he led him to the arm-chair which he had just occupied — it was the only one in the room — and, after thanking him for his visit, turned to the servant, and bade him shut the door.

"I am in some surprise, and in some doubt, Sir Henry," said Mr. Croyland, with his sharp eyes twinkling a little. "I came here to see one Captain Osborn; and I find a gentleman very like him, in truth, but certainly a much smarter looking person, whom I am told is Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Layton, Knight of the Bath, &c. &c. &c.; and yet he seems to look upon old Zachary Croyland as a friend, too."

"He does, from his heart, I can assure you, Mr. Croyland," replied the young officer; "and I trust you will ever permit him to do so. But if it becomes us to deceive no man, it becomes us still more not to deceive a friend; and on that account it was I asked your presence here, to explain to you one or two circumstances which I thought it but just you should know, before I ventured to present myself at your house."

"Pray speak, Sir Henry," replied Mr. Croyland — "I am all ears."

The young officer paused for a moment, and a shadow came over his brow, as if something painful passed through his mind; but then, with a slight motion of his hand, as if he would have waved away unpleasant thoughts, he said, "I must first tell you, my dear Sir, that I am the son of the Reverend Henry Layton, whom you once knew, and the nephew of that Charles Osborn, with whom you were also intimately acquainted."

"The dearest friend I ever had in the world," replied Mr. Croyland, blowing his nose violently.

"Then I trust you will extend the same friendship to his nephew," said the Colonel.

"I don't know — I don't know," answered Mr. Croyland; "that must depend upon circumstances. I'm a very crabbed, tiresome old fellow, Sir Henry; and my friendships are not very sudden ones. But I have patted your head many a time when you were a child, and that's something. Then you are very like your father, and a little like your uncle, that's something more: so we may get on, I think. But what have you got to say more? and what in the name of fortune made you call yourself Captain Osborn, to an old friend of your family like myself?"

"I did not do so, if you recollect," replied the young officer. "It was my friend Digby who gave me that name; and you must pardon me, if, on many accounts, I yielded to the trick; for I was coming down here on a difficult service — one that I am not accustomed to, and do not like; and I was very desirous of seeing a little of the country, and of learning something of the habits of the persons with whom I had to deal, before I was called upon to act."

"And devilish well you did act when you set about it," cried Mr. Croyland. "I watched you this morning over the wall, and wondered a little that you did not come on to my house at once."

"It is upon that subject that I must now speak," said Sir Henry Layton, taking a grave tone, "and I must touch upon many painful subjects in the past. Just when I was about to write to you, Mr. Croyland, to say that I would come, in accordance with your kind invitation, I learned that your niece, Miss Croyland, is staying at your house. Now, I know not whether you have been informed, that long ago —"

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," answered Mr. Croyland, quickly. "There was a great deal of love and courting, and all that sort of boy and girl's stuff."

"It must be man and woman's stuff now, Mr. Croyland," replied the young officer, "for I must tell you fairly and at once, I love her as deeply, as truly as ever. Years have made no difference; other scenes have made no change. The same as I went, in every thought and feeling, I have returned; and I can

never think of her without emotion, which I can never speak to her without expressing."

"Indeed — indeed!" said Mr. Croyland, apparently in some surprise. "That does make some difference."

"That is what I feared," continued Sir Henry Layton. "Your brother disapproved of our engagement. In consequence of it, he behaved to my father in a way — on which I will not dwell. You would not have behaved in such a way, I know; and although I should think any means justifiable, to see your niece when in her father's mansion, to tell her how deeply I love her still, and to ask her to sacrifice fortune and everything to share a soldier's fate, yet I did not think it would be right or honourable, to come into the house of a friend under a feigned name, and seek his niece — for seek her I should wherever I found her — when he might share the same views as his brother, or at all events think himself bound to support them. In short, Mr. Croyland, I knew that when you were aware of my real name and of my real feelings, it would make a difference, and a great one."

"Not the difference you think, Harry," replied the old gentleman, holding out his hand to him; "but quite the reverse. — I'll tell you what, young man, I think you a devilish fine, high-spirited, honourable fellow, and the only one I ever saw whom I should like to marry my Edith. So don't say a word more about it. Come and dine with me to-day, as soon as you've got all this job over. You shall see her; you shall talk to her; you shall make all your arrangements together; and if there's a post-chaise in the country, I'll put you in and shut the door with my own hands. My brother is an old fool, and worse than an old fool, too — something very like an old rogue — at least, so he behaved to your father, and not much better to his own child; but I don't care a straw about him, and never did; and I never intend to humour one of his whims."

Sir Henry Layton pressed the old gentleman's hand in his, with much emotion; for the prospect seemed brightening to him, and the dark clouds which had so long overshadowed his course appeared to be breaking away. He had been hitherto like a traveller on a strong and spirited horse, steadfastly pursuing his

course, and making his way onward, with vigour and determination, but with a dark and threatening sky over head, and not even a gleam of hope to lead him on. Distinction, honours, competence, command, he had obtained by his own talents and his own energies; he was looked up to by those below him, by his equals, even by many of his superiors. The eyes of all who knew him turned towards him as to one who was destined to be a leading man in his day. Everything seemed fair and smiling around him, and no eye could see the cloud that overshadowed him but his own. But what to him were honours, or wealth, or the world's applause, if the love of his early years were to remain blighted for ever? and in the tented field, the city, or the court, the shadow had still remained upon his heart's best feelings, not checking his energies, but saddening all his enjoyments. How often is it in the world, that we thus see the bright, the admired, the powerful, the prosperous, with the grave hue of painful thoughts upon the brow, the never unmingled smile, the lapses of gloomy meditation, and ask ourselves, "What is the secret sorrow in the midst of all this success? what is the fountain of darkness that turns the stream of sunshine grey? what the canker-worm that preys upon so bright a flower?" Deep, deep in the recesses of the heart, it lies gnawing in silence; but never ceasing, and never satisfied. Now, however, there was a light in the heavens for him; and whether it was as one of those rays that sometimes break through a storm, and then pass away, no more to be seen till the day dies in darkness; or whether it was the first glad harbinger of a serene evening after a stormy morning, the conclusion of this tale must show.

"I'll tell you something, my dear boy," continued Mr. Croyland, forgetting that he was speaking to the Colonel of a dragoon regiment, and going back at a leap to early days. "Your father was my old school-fellow and dear companion; your uncle was the best friend I ever had, and the founder of my fortune; for to his interest I owe my first appointment to India — ay, and to his generosity the greater part of my outfit and my passage. To them I am indebted for everything, to my brother for nothing; and I look upon you as a relation much more than upon him; so I have

no very affectionate motives for countenancing or assisting him in doing what is not right. I'll tell you something more, too, Harry; I was sure that you would do what is honourable and right — not because you have got a good name in the world; for I am always doubtful of the world's good names, and, besides, I never heard the name of Sir Harry Layton till this blessed day — but because you were the son of one honest man and the nephew of another, and a good wild frank boy too. So I was quite sure you would not come to my house under a false name, when my niece was in it, without, at all events, letting me into the secret; and you have justified my confidence, young man."

"I would not have done such a thing for the world," replied the young officer; "but may I ask, then, my dear Mr. Croyland, if you recognised me in the stage coach? for it must be eighteen or nineteen years since you saw me."

"Don't call me Mr. Croyland," said the old gentleman, abruptly; "call me Zachary, or Nabob, or Misanthrope, or Bear, or anything but that. As to your question, I say, no. I did not recognise you the least in the world. I saw in your face something like the faces of old friends, and I liked it on that account. But as for the rest of the matter, there's a little secret, my boy — a little bit of a puzzle. By one way or another — it matters not what — I had found out that Captain Osborn was my old friend Layton's son; but till I came here to-day, I had no notion that he was Colonel of the regiment, and a Knight of the Bath, to boot, as your corporal fellow took care to inform me. I thought you had been going under a false name, perhaps, all this time, and fancied I should find Captain Osborn quite well known in the regiment. I had a shrewd notion, too, that you had sent for me to tell the secret; but I was determined to let you explain yourself without helping you at all; for I'm a great deal fonder of men's actions than their words, Harry."

"Is it fair to ask, who told you who I was?" asked Sir Henry Layton. "My friend Digby has some —"

"No, no," cried Mr. Croyland; "it wasn't that good, rash, rattle-pate, coxcomb of a fellow, who is only fit to be caged with little Zara; and then they may live together very well, like two

monkeys in a show-box. No, he had nothing to do with it, though he has been busy enough since he came here, shooting partridges, and fighting young Radford, and all that sort of thing."

"Fighting young Radford!" exclaimed Sir Henry Layton, suddenly grasping the sheath of his sword with his right hand. "He should not have done that — at least, without letting me know."

"Why, he knew nothing about it himself," replied Mr. Croyland, "till the minute it took place. The young vagabond followed him to my house; so I civilly told my brother's pet that I didn't want to see him; and he walked away with your friend Digby just across the lawn in front of the house, when, after a few minutes of pleasant conversation, the baronet applies me a horsewhip, with considerable unction and perseverance, to the shoulders of Richard Radford, Esquire, junior; upon which out come the pinking-irons, and in the course of the scuffle, Sir Edward receives a little hole in the shoulder, and Mr. Radford is disarmed and brought upon his knee, with a very unpleasant and ungentleman-like bump upon his forehead, bestowed, with hearty goodwill, by the hilt of Master Digby's sword. Well, when he had got him there, instead of quietly poking a hole through him, as any man of common sense would have done, your friend lets him get up again, and ride away, just as a man might be supposed to pinch a Cobra that had bit him, by the tail, and then say, 'Walk off, my friend.' However, so stands the matter; and young Radford rode away, vowing all sorts of vengeance. He'll have it, too, if he can get it; for he's as spiteful as a baboon; so I hope you've caught him, as he was with these smuggling vagabonds, that's certain."

Sir Henry Layton shook his head. "He has escaped, I am sorry to say," he replied. "How, I cannot divine; for I took means to catch him that I thought were infallible. All the roads through Harbourne Wood were guarded, but yet in that wood, all trace of him was lost. He left his horse in the midst of it, and must have escaped by some of the by-paths."

"He's concealed in my brother's house, for a hundred guineas!" cried Mr. Croyland. "Robert's bewitched, to a certainty;

for nothing else but witchcraft could make a man take an owl for a cock pheasant. Oh yes! there he is, snug in Harbourne House, depend upon it, feeding upon venison and turbot, and with a magnum of claret and two bottles of port to keep him comfortable — a drunken, beastly, vicious brute! A cross between a wolf and a swine, and not without a touch of the fox either — though the first figure is the best; for his father was the wolf, and his mother the sow, if all tales be true.”

“He cannot be in Harbourne House, I should think,” replied the Colonel, “for my dragoons searched it, it seems, violating the laws a little, for they had no competent authority with them; and besides he would not have put himself within Digby’s reach, I imagine.”

“Then he’s up in a tree, roosting in the day, like a bird of prey,” rejoined Mr. Croyland, in his quick way. “It’s very unlucky he has escaped — very unlucky indeed.”

“At all events,” answered the young officer, “thus much have we gained, my dear friend: he dare not show himself in this county for years. He was seen, by competent witnesses, at the head of these smugglers, taking an active part with them in resistance to lawful authority. Blood has been shed, lives have been sacrificed, and a felony has been committed; so that if he is wise, and can manage it, he will get out of England. If he fail of escaping, or venture to show himself, he will grace the gallows, depend upon it.”

“Heaven be praised!” cried Mr. Croyland. “Give me the first tidings, when it is to happen, Harry, that I may order four horses, and hire a window. I would not have him hanged without my seeing it for a hundred pounds.”

Sir Henry Layton smiled faintly, saying, “Those are sad sights, my dear Sir, and we have too many of them in this county; but you have not told me, from whom you received intimation that Captain Osborn and Henry Osborn Layton were the same person.”

“That’s a secret — that’s a secret, Hal,” answered Mr. Croyland. “So now tell me when you’ll come. — You’ll be over to-night, I suppose, or have time and wisdom tamed the eagerness of love?”

“Oh no, my dear Sir,” answered Layton; “but I have still some business to settle here, and have promised to be in Hythe to-night. Before I go, however, I will ride over for an hour or two, for, till I have seen that dear girl again, and have heard her feelings and her wishes from her own lips, my thoughts will be all in confusion. I shall be calmer and more reasonable afterwards.”

“Much need!” answered Mr. Croyland. “But now I must leave you. I shan’t say a word about it all, till you come; for preparing people’s minds is all nonsense. It is only drawing them out upon the rack of expectation, which leaves them bruised and crushed, with no power to resist whatever is to come afterwards. — But don’t be long, Harry, for remember that delays are dangerous.”

Layton promised to set out as soon as one of his messengers, whom he expected every instant, had returned; and going down with Mr. Croyland, to the door of his carriage, he bade him adieu, and watched him as he drove away, gratifying the eyes of the people of Woodchurch with a view of his fine person, as he stood uncovered at the door. In the meantime, Mr. Croyland took his way slowly back towards his own dwelling.

What had happened there during his absence, we shall see presently.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL things have their several stages; and, without a knowledge of the preceding one it is impossible to judge accurately of any event which is the immediate subject of our contemplation. The life of every one, the history of the whole world that we inhabit, is but a regular drama with its scenes and acts, each depending for its interest upon that which preceded. I therefore judge it necessary, before going on to detail the events which took place in Mr. Croyland’s house during his absence to visit the dwelling of his brother, and give some account of that which produced them. On the same eventful morning, then, of which we have spoken so much already, the inhabitants of Harbourne House slept quietly during the little engagement between the smugglers and the dra-

goons, unaware that things of great importance to their little circle were passing at no great distance. I have mentioned the inhabitants of Harbourne House; but perhaps it would have been more proper to have said the master, his family, and his guest; for a number of the servants were up; the windows were opened; and the wind, setting from Woodchurch, brought the sound of fire-arms thence. The movement of the troops from the side of High Halden was also remarked by one of the housemaids and a footman, as the young lady was leaning out of one of the windows with the young gentleman by her side. In a minute or two after they perceived, galloping across the country, two or three parties of men on horseback, as if in flight and pursuit. Most of these took to the right or left, and were soon lost to the sight; but at length one solitary horseman came on at a furious speed towards Harbourne House, with a small party of dragoons following him direct at a couple of hundred yards' distance, while two or three of the soldiery were seen scattered away to the right, and a somewhat larger body appeared moving down at a quick pace to the left, as if to cut the fugitive off at Gallows Green.

The horse of the single rider seemed tired and dirty; and he was himself without a hat; but nevertheless, they pushed on with such rapidity, that a few seconds, from the time when they were first seen, brought steed and horseman into the little parish road which I have mentioned as running in front of the house, and passing round the grounds into the wood. As the fugitive drew near, the maid exclaimed, with a sort of a half scream, "Why, Lord ha' mercy, Matthew, it's young Mr. Radford!"

"To be sure it is," answered the footman; "didn't you see that before, Betsy? There's a number of the dragoons after him, too. He's been up to some of his tricks, I'll warrant."

"Well, I hope he won't come in here, at all events," rejoined the maid, "for I shouldn't like it, if we were to have any fighting in the house."

"I shall go and shut the hall door," said the footman, drily — Richard Radford not having ingratiated himself as much with the servants as he had done with their master. But this precaution was rendered unnecessary; for the young man showed no inclina-

tion to enter the house, but passing along the road with the rapidity of an arrow, was soon lost in the wood, without even looking up towards the house of Sir Robert Croyland. Several of the dragoons followed him quickly; but two of them planted themselves at the corner of the road, and remained there immovable.

The maid then observed, that she thought it high time the gentlefolks should be called; and she proceeded to execute her laudable purpose, taking care that tidings of what she had seen concerning Mr. Radford should be communicated to Sir Robert Croyland, to Zara, and to the servant of Sir Edward Digby, who again carried the intelligence to his master. The whole house was soon afoot; and Sir Robert was just out of his room in his dressing-gown, when three of the soldiers entered the mansion, expressing their determination to search it, and declaring their conviction that the smuggler whom they had been pursuing had taken refuge there.

In vain Sir Robert Croyland remonstrated, and inquired if they had a warrant; in vain the servants assured the dragoons that no person had entered during the morning. The sergeant who was at their head, persisted in asserting that the fugitive must have come in there, just when he was hid from his pursuers by the trees, assigning as a reason for this belief, that they had found his horse turned loose not a hundred yards from the house. They accordingly proceeded to execute their intention, meeting with no farther impediment till they reached the room of Sir Edward Digby, who, though he did not choose to interfere, not being on duty himself, warned the sergeant that he must be careful of what he was doing, as it appeared that he had neither magistrate, warrant, nor Custom-House officer with him.

The sergeant, however, who was a bold and resolute fellow, and moreover a little heated and excited by the pursuit, took the responsibility upon himself, saying that he was fully authorized by Mr. Birchett to follow, search for, and apprehend one Richard Radford, and that he had the Colonel's orders, too. Certainly, not a nook or corner of Harbourne House did he leave unexamined before he retired, grumbling and wondering at his want of success.

Previous to his going, Sir Edward Digby charged him with a

message to the Colonel, which proved as great an enigma to the soldier as the escape of Richard Radford. "Tell him," said the young baronet, "that I am ready to come down if he wants me; but that if he does not, I think I am quite as well where I am."

The breakfast passed in that sort of hurried and desultory conversation which such a dish of gossip as now poured in from all quarters usually produces, when served up at the morning meal. Sir Robert Croyland, indeed, looked ill at ease, laughed and jested in an unnatural and strained tone upon smugglers and smuggling, and questioned every servant that came in for further tidings. The reports that he thus received were as full of falsehood and exaggeration as all such reports generally are. The property captured was said to be immense. Two or three hundred smugglers were mentioned as having been taken, and a whole legion of them killed. Some had made confession, and clearly proved that the whole property was Mr. Radford's; and some had fought to the last, and killed an incredible number of the soldiers. To believe the butler, who received his information from the hind, who had his from the shepherd, the man called the Major, before he died, had absolutely breakfasted on dragoons, as if they had been prawns; but all agreed that never had such a large body of contraband traders been assembled before, or suffered such a disastrous defeat, in any of their expeditions.

Sir Edward Digby gathered from the whole account, that his friend had been fully successful, that the smugglers had fought fiercely, that blood had been shed, and that Richard Radford, after having taken an active part in the affray, was now a fugitive, and, as the young baronet fancied, never to appear upon the stage again. But still Sir Robert Croyland did not seem by any means so well pleased as might have been wished; and a dark and thoughtful cloud would frequently come over his heavy brow, while a slight twitching of his lip seemed to indicate that anxiety had as great a share in his feelings as mortification.

Mrs. Barbara Croyland amused herself, as usual, by doing her best to tease every one around her, and by saying the most malapropos things in the world. She spoke with great commiseration of "the poor smugglers:" every particle of her pity was

bestowed upon them. She talked of the soldiers as if they had been the most fierce and sanguinary monsters in Europe, who had attacked, unprovoked, a party of poor men that were doing them no harm; till Zara's glowing cheek recalled to her mind, that these very blood-thirsty dragoons were Sir Edward Digby's companions and friends; and then she made the compliment more pointed by apologizing to the young baronet, and assuring him that she did not think for a moment he would commit such acts. Her artillery was next turned against her brother; and, in a pleasant tone of raillery, she joked him upon the subject of young Mr. Radford, and of the search the soldiers had made, looking with a meaning smile at Zara, and saying, "She dared say, Sir Robert could tell where he was, if he liked."

The baronet declared, sharply and truly, that he knew nothing about the young man; but Mrs. Barbara shook her head and nodded, and looked knowing, adding various agreeable insinuations of the same kind as before — all in the best humour possible — till Sir Robert Croyland was put quite out of temper, and would have retorted violently, had he not known that to do so always rendered the matter ten times worse. Even poor Zara did not altogether escape; but, as we are hurrying on to important events, we must pass over her share of infliction.

The conclusion of Mrs. Barbara's field-day was perhaps the most signal achievement of all. Breakfast had come to an end, though the meal had been somewhat protracted; and the party were just lingering out a few minutes before they rose, still talking on the subject of the skirmish of that morning, when the good lady thought fit to remark — "Well, we may guess for ever; but we shall soon know more about it, for I dare say we shall have Mr. Radford over here before an hour is gone, and he must know if the goods were his."

This seemed to startle — nay, to alarm Sir Robert Croyland. He looked round with a sharp, quick turn of his head, and then rose at once, saying, "Well, whether he comes or not, I must go out and see about a good many things. Would you like to take a ride, Sir Edward Digby, or what will you do?"

"Why, I think I must stay here for the present," replied the

young baronet; "I may have a summons unexpectedly, and ought not to be absent."

"Well, you will excuse me, I know," answered his entertainer. "I must leave my sister and Zara to amuse you for an hour or two, till I return."

Thus saying, and evidently in a great bustle, Sir Robert Croyland quitted the room and ordered his horse. But just as the three whom he had left in the breakfast-room were sauntering quietly towards the library — Sir Edward Digby calculating by the way how he might best get rid of Mrs. Barbara, in order to enjoy the fair Zara's company undisturbed — they came upon the baronet at the moment when he was encountered by one of his servants bringing him some unpleasant intelligence. "Please, Sir Robert," said the man, with a knowing wink of the eye, "all the horses are out."

"Out!" cried the baronet, with a look of fury and consternation. "What do you mean by out, fellow?"

"Why, they were taken out of the stable last night, Sir," replied the man. "I dare say you know where they went; and they have not come back again yet."

"Pray, have mine been taken also?" demanded Sir Edward Digby, very well understanding what sort of an expedition Sir Robert Croyland's horses had gone upon.

"Oh dear, no, Sir!" answered the man; "your servant keeps the key of that stable himself, Sir."

The young baronet instantly offered his host the use of one of his steeds, which was gratefully accepted by Sir Robert Croyland, who, however, thought fit to enter into an exculpation of himself, somewhat tedious withal, assuring his guest that the horses had been taken without his approbation or consent, and that he had no knowledge whatsoever of the transaction in which they were engaged.

Sir Edward Digby professed himself quite convinced that such was the case, and in order to relieve his host from the embarrassment which he seemed to feel, explained that he was already aware that the Kentish smugglers were in the habit of borrowing horses without the owner's consent.

In our complicated state of society, however, everything hinges upon trifles. We have made the watch so fine, that a grain of dust stops the whole movement; and the best arranged plans are thrown out by the negligence, the absence, or the folly of a servant, a friend, or a messenger. Sir Edward Digby's groom could not be found for more than a quarter of an hour: when he was, at length, brought to light, the horse had to be saddled. An hour had now nearly elapsed since the master of the house had given orders for his own horse to be brought round immediately: he was evidently uneasy at the delay, peevish, restless, uncomfortable; and in the end, he said he would mount at the back door, as it was the nearest and the most convenient. He even waited in the vestibule; but suddenly he turned, walked through the double doors leading to the stable-yard, and said he heard the horse coming up.

Mrs. Barbara Croyland had, in the meantime, amused herself and her niece in the library, with the door open; and sometimes she worked a paroquet, in green, red, and white silk embroidery — a favourite occupation for ladies in her juvenile days — and sometimes she gazed out of the window, or listened to the conversation of her brother and his guest in the vestibule. At the very moment, however, when Sir Robert was making his exit by the doors between the principal part of the house and the offices, Mrs. Barbara called loudly after him, "Brother Robert! — Brother Robert! — Here is Mr. Radford coming."

The baronet turned a deaf ear, and shut the door. He would have locked it, too, if the evasion would not have then been too palpable. But Mrs. Barbara was resolved that he should know that Mr. Radford was coming; and up she started, casting down half-a-dozen cards of silk. Zara tried to stop her; for she knew her father, and all the signs and indications of his humours; but her efforts were in vain. Mrs. Barbara dashed past her, rushed through both doors, leaving them open behind her, and caught her brother's arms just as the horse, which he had thought fit to hear approach a little before it really did so, was led up slowly from the stables to the back door of the mansion.

"Robert, here is Mr. Radford!" said Mrs. Barbara, aloud. "I knew you would like to see him."

The baronet turned his head, and saw his worthy friend, through the open doors, just entering the vestibule. To the horror and surprise of his sister, he uttered a low but bitter curse, adding, in tones quite distinct enough to reach her ear, "Woman, you have ruined me!"

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Barbara; "why, I thought—"

"Hush! silence!" said Sir Robert Croyland, in a menacing tone; "not another word, on your life;" and turning, he met Mr. Radford with the utmost suavity, but with a certain degree of restraint which he had not time to banish entirely from his manner.

"Ah, Mr. Radford!" he exclaimed, shaking him, too, heartily by the hand, "I was just going out to inquire about some things of importance;" and he gazed at him with a look which he intended to be very significant of the inquiries he had proposed to institute. But his glance was hesitating and ill-assured; and Mr. Radford replied, with the coolest and most self-possessed air possible, and with a firm, fixed gaze upon the baronet's countenance.

"Indeed, Sir Robert!" he said, "perhaps I can satisfy you upon some points; but, at all events, I must speak with you for a few minutes before you go. Good morning, Sir Edward Digby: have you had any sport in the field? — I will not detain you a quarter of an hour, my good friend. We had better go into your little room."

He led the way thither as he spoke; and Sir Robert Croyland followed with a slow and faltering step. He knew Richard Radford; he knew what that calm and self-possessed manner meant. He was aware of the significance of courteous expressions and amicable terms from the man who called him his good friend; and if there was a being upon earth, on whose head Sir Robert Croyland would have wished to stamp as on a viper's, it was the placid benign personage who preceded him.

They entered the room in which the baronet usually sat in a morning to transact his business with his steward, and to arrange

his affairs; and Sir Robert carefully shut the door behind him, trying, during the one moment that his back was turned upon his unwelcome guest, to compose his agitated features into the expression of haughty and self-sufficient tranquillity which they usually wore.

“Sit down, Radford,” he said — “pray sit down, if it be but for ten minutes;” and he pointed to the arm-chair on the other side of the table.

Mr. Radford sat down, and leaned his head upon his hand, looking in the baronet's face with a scrutinizing gaze. If Sir Robert Croyland understood him well, he also understood Sir Robert Croyland, heart and mind — every corporeal fibre — every mental peculiarity. He saw clearly that his companion was terrified; he divined that he had wished to avoid him; and the satisfaction that he felt at having caught him just as he was going out, at having frustrated his hope of escape, had a pleasant malice in it, which compensated for a part of all that he had suffered during that morning, as report after report reached him of the utter annihilation of his hopes of immense gain, the loss of a ruinous sum of money, and the danger and narrow escape of his son. He had not slept a wink during the whole of the preceding night; and he had passed the hours in a state of nervous anxiety which would have totally unmanned many a strong-minded man when his first fears were realized. But Mr. Radford's mind was of a peculiar construction: apprehension he might feel, but never, by any chance, discouragement. All his pain was in anticipation, not in endurance. The moment a blow was struck, it was over: his thoughts turned to new resources; and, in reconstructing schemes which had been overthrown, in framing new ones, or pursuing old ones which had slumbered, he instantly found comfort for the past. Thus he seemed as fresh, as resolute, as unabashed by fortune's late frowns, as ever; but there was a rankling bitterness, an eager, wolf-like energy in his heart, which sprung both from angry disappointment and from the desperate aspect of his present fortune; and such feelings naturally communicated some portion of their acerbity to the expression of his countenance, which no effort could totally banish.

He gazed upon Sir Robert Croyland, then with a keen and inquiring look, not altogether untinged with that sort of pity which amounts to scorn; and, after a momentary pause, he said, "Well, Croyland, you have heard all, I suppose!"

"No, not all — not all, Radford," answered the baronet, hesitating; "I was going out to inquire."

"I can save you the trouble, then," replied Mr. Radford, drily. "I am ruined. That is to say, in the two last ventures I have lost considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds."

Sir Robert Croyland waved his head sadly, saying, "Terrible, terrible! but what can be done?"

"Oh, several things," answered Mr. Radford, "and that is what I have come to speak to you about, because the first must rest with you, my excellent good friend."

"But where is your son, poor fellow?" asked the baronet, eager to avoid, as long as possible, the point to which their conversation was tending. "They tell me he was well nigh taken; and, after there has been blood shed, that would have been destruction. Do you know they came and searched this house for him?"

"No, I had not heard of that, Croyland," replied Mr. Radford; "but he is near enough, well enough, and safe enough to marry your fair daughter."

"Ay, yes," answered Sir Robert; "that must be thought of, and —"

"Oh dear, no!" cried the other, interrupting him; "it has been thought of enough already, Croyland — too much, perhaps; now, it must be done."

"Well, I will go over to Edith at once," said the baronet, "and I will urge her, by every inducement. I will tell her, that it is her duty, that it is my will, and that she must and shall obey."

Mr. Radford rose slowly off his seat, crossed over the rug to the place where Sir Robert Croyland was placed; and, leaning his hand upon the arm of the other's chair, he bent down his head,

saying in a low but very clear voice and perfectly distinct words, "Tell her, her father's life depends upon it!"

Sir Robert Croyland shrank from him, as if an asp had approached his cheek; and he turned deadly pale. "No, Radford — no," he replied, in a faltering and deprecatory tone; "you cannot mean such a horrible thing. I will do all that I can to make her yield — I will, indeed — I will insist — I will —"

"Sir Robert Croyland," said Mr. Radford, sternly and slowly, "I will have no more trifling. I have indulged you too long. Your daughter must be my son's wife before he quits this country — which must be the case for a time, till we can get this affair wiped out by our parliamentary influence. Her fortune must be his, she must be his wife, I say, before four days are over. — Now, my good friend," he continued, falling back, in a degree, into his usual manner, which had generally a touch of sarcastic bitterness in it when addressing his present companion, "what means you may please to adopt to arrive at this desirable result I cannot tell; but as the young lady has shown an aversion to the match, not very flatteying to my son —"

"Is it not his own fault?" cried Sir Robert Croyland, roused to some degree of indignation and resistance — "has he ever, by word or deed, sought to remove that reluctance? Has he wooed her as woman always requires to be wooed? Has he not rather shown a preference to her sister, paid her all attention, courted, admired her?"

"Pity you suffered it, Sir Robert," answered Radford; "but permit me, in your courtesy, to go on with what I was saying. As the young lady has shown this unfortunate reluctance, I anticipate no effect from your proposed use of parental authority. I believe your requests and your commands will be equally unavailing; and, therefore, I say, tell her, her father's life depends upon it; for I will have no more trifling, Sir Robert — no more delay — no more hesitation. It must be settled at once — this very day. Before midnight, I must hear that she consents, or — you understand! — and consent she will, if you but employ the right means. She may show herself obstinate, undutiful, careless of your wishes and commands; but I do not think that

she would like to be the one to tie a halter round her father's neck, or to bring what I think you gentlemen of heraldry and coat-armour call a cross-patonce into the family-bearing — ha, ha, ha! — Do you, Sir Robert?"

The unhappy gentleman to whom he spoke covered his eyes with his hand; but, from beneath, his features could be seen working with the agitation of various emotions, in which rage, impotent though it might be, was not without its share. Suddenly, however, a gleam of hope seemed to shoot across his mind; he withdrew his hand; he looked up with some light in his eyes. "A thought has struck me, Radford," he said; "Zara — we have talked of Zara — why not substitute her for Edith? Listen to me — listen to me. You have not heard all."

Mr. Radford shook his head. "It cannot be done," he replied — "it is quite out of the question."

"Nay, but hear!" exclaimed the baronet. "Not so much out of the question as you think. Look at the whole circumstances, Radford. The great obstacle with Edith, is that unfortunate engagement with young Layton. She looks upon herself as his wife; she has told me so a thousand times; and I doubt even the effect of the terrible course which you urge upon me so cruelly."

Mr. Radford's brow had grown exceedingly dark at the very mention of the name of Layton; but he said nothing, and, as if to keep down the feelings that were swelling in his heart, set his teeth hard in his under lip. Sir Robert Croyland saw all these marks of anger, but went on — "Now, the case is different with Zara. Your son has sought her, and evidently admires her; and she has shown herself by no means unfavourable towards him. Besides, I can do with her what I like. There is no such obstacle in her case; and I could bend her to my will with a word — Yes, but hear me out. I know what you would say: she has no fortune; all the land that I can dispose of is mortgaged to the full — the rest goes to my brother, if he survives me. — True, all very true! — But, Radford, listen — if I can induce my brother to give Zara the same fortune which Edith possesses — if this night I can bring it you under his own hand, that she shall have fifty

thousand pounds? — You shake your head; you doubt that he will do it; but I can tell you that he would willingly give it, to save Edith from your son. I am ready to pledge you my word, that you shall have that engagement, under his own hand, this very night, or that Edith shall become your son's wife within four days. Let us cast aside all idle circumlocution. It is Edith's fortune for your son, that you require. You can care nothing personally which of the two he marries. As for him, he evidently prefers Zara. She is also well inclined to him. I can — I am sure I can — offer you the same fortune with her. Why should you object?"

Mr. Radford had resumed his seat, and with his arms folded on his chest, and his head bent, had remained in a listening posture. But nothing that he heard seemed to produce any change in his countenance; and when Sir Robert Croyland had concluded, he rose again, took a step towards him, and replied, through his shut teeth, "You are mistaken, Sir Robert Croyland — it is not fortune alone I seek. — It is revenge! — There, ask me no questions, I have told you my determination. Your daughter Edith shall be my son's wife within four days, or Maidstone jail, trial, and execution, shall be your lot. The haughty family of Croyland shall bear the stain of felony upon them to the last generation; and your daughter shall know — for if you do not tell her, I will — that it is her obstinacy which sends her father to the gallows. No more trifling — no more nonsense! Act, Sir, as you think fit; but remember, that the words — once passed my lips — can never be recalled; that the secret I have kept buried for so many years, shall to-morrow morning be published to the whole world, if to-night you do not bring me your daughter's consent to what I demand. I am using no vain threats, Sir Robert Croyland," he continued, resuming a somewhat softened tone, "and I do not urge you to this without some degree of regret. You have been very kind and friendly; you have done me good service on several occasions; and it will be with great regret that I become the instrument of your destruction. But still every man has a conscience of some kind. Even I am occasionally troubled with qualms; and I frequently reproach myself for concealing what I

am bound to reveal. It is a pity this marriage was not concluded long ago, for then, connected with you by the closest ties; I should have felt myself more justified in holding my tongue. Now, however, it is absolutely necessary that your daughter Edith should become my son's wife. I have pointed out the means which I think will soonest bring it to bear; and if you do not use them, you must abide the consequences. But mark me — no attempt at delay, no prevarication, no hesitation! A clear, positive, distinct answer this night by twelve o'clock, or you are lost!"

Sir Robert Croyland had leaned his arms upon the table, and pressed his eyes upon his arms. His whole frame shook with emotion, and the softer, and seemingly more kindly words of the man before him, were even bitterer to him than the harsher and the fiercer. Though he did not see his face, he knew that there was far more sarcasm than tenderness in them. He had been his slave — his tool, for years — his tool through the basest and most unmanly of human passions — fear; and he felt, not only that he was despised, but that at that moment Radford was revelling in contempt. He could have got up and stabbed him where he stood; for he was naturally a passionate and violent man. But fear had still the dominion; and after a bitter struggle with himself, he conquered his anger, and gave himself up to the thought of meeting the circumstances in which he was placed, as best he might. He was silent for several moments, however, after Mr. Radford had ceased speaking; and then, looking up with an anxious eye and quivering lip, he said, "But how is it possible, Radford, that the marriage should take place in four days? The banns could not be published; and even if you got a licence, your son could not appear at church within the prescribed hours, without running a fatal risk."

"We will have a special licence, my good friend," answered Mr. Radford, with a contemptuous smile. "Do not trouble yourself about that. You will have quite enough to do with your daughter, I should imagine, without annoying yourself with other things. As to my son, I will manage his part of the affair; and he can marry your daughter in your drawing-room, or mine, at an hour when there will be no eager eyes abroad. Money can do all

things; and a special licence is not so very expensive but that I can afford it, still. My drawing-room will be best; for then we shall be all secure."

"But, Radford — Radford!" said Sir Robert Croyland, "if I do — if I bring Edith at the time appointed — if she become your son's wife — you will give me up that paper, that fatal deposition?"

"Oh, yes, assuredly," replied Mr. Radford, with an insulting smile; "I can hand it over to you as part of the marriage settlement. You need not be the least afraid! — and now, I think I must go; for I have business to settle as well as you."

"Stay, stay a moment, Radford," said the baronet, rising and coming nearer to him. "You spoke of revenge just now. What is it that you mean?"

"I told you to ask no questions," answered the other, sharply.

"But at least tell me, if it is on me or mine that you seek revenge!" exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland. "I am unconscious of ever having injured or offended you in any way."

"Oh dear, no," replied Mr. Radford. "You have nothing to do with it — no, nor your daughter either, though she deserves a little punishment for her ill-treatment to my son. No, but there is one on whom I will have revenge — deep and bitter revenge, too! But that is my affair; and I do not choose to say more. You have heard my resolutions; and you know me well enough, to be sure that I will keep my word. So now go to your daughter, and manage the matter as you judge best; but if you will take my advice, you will simply ask her consent, and make her fully aware that her father's life depends upon it; and now good-by, my dear friend. Good luck attend you on your errand; for I would a great deal rather not have any hand in bringing you, where destiny seems inclined to lead you very soon."

Thus saying, he turned and quitted the room; and Sir Robert Croyland remained musing for several minutes, his thoughts first resting upon the last part of their conversation. "Revenge!" he said; "he must mean my brother; and it will be bitter enough, to him, to see Edith married to this youth. Bitter enough to me, too; but it must be done — it must be done!"

He pressed his hand upon his heart, and then went out to mount his horse; but pausing in the vestibule, he told the butler to bring him a glass of brandy. The man hastened to obey; for his master's face was as pale as death, and he thought that Sir Robert was going to faint. But when the baronet had swallowed the stimulating liquor, he walked to the back door with a quick and tolerably steady step, mounted, and rode away alone.

Before I follow him, though anxious to do so as quickly as possible, I must say a few words in regard to Mr. Radford's course. After he had reached the parish road I have mentioned, — on which one or two dragoons were still visible, slowly patrolling round Harbourne Wood, — the man who had exercised so terrible an influence upon poor Sir Robert Croyland turned his horse's head upon the path which led straight through the trees towards the cottage of Widow Clare. His face was still dark and cloudy; and, trusting to the care and sure-footedness of his beast, he went on with a loose rein and his eyes bent down towards his saddle-bow, evidently immersed in deep thought. When he had got about two-thirds across the wood, he started and turned round his head; for there was the sound of a horse's feet behind, and he instantly perceived a dragoon following him, and apparently keeping him in sight. Mr. Radford rode on, however, till he came out not far from the gate of Mrs. Clare's garden, when he saw another soldier riding slowly round the wood. With a careless air, however, and as if he scarcely perceived these circumstances, he dismounted, buckled the rein of his bridle slowly over the palings of the garden, and went into the cottage, closing the door after him. He found the widow and her daughter busily employed with the needle, making somewhat smarter clothes than those they wore on ordinary occasions. It was poor Kate's bridal finery.

Mrs. Clare instantly rose, and dropped a low curtsy to Mr. Radford, who had of late years frequently visited her cottage, and occasionally contributed a little to her comfort, in a kindly and judicious manner. Sometimes he had sent her down a load of wood, to keep the house warm; sometimes he had given her a large roll of woollen cloth, a new gown for her daughter or herself,

or a little present of money. But Mr. Radford had his object: he always had.

"Well, Mrs. Clare!" said Mr. Radford, in as easy and quiet a tone as if nothing had happened to agitate his mind or derange his plans; "so, my pretty little friend, Kate, is going to be married to worthy Jack Harding, I find."

Kate blushed and held down her head, and Mrs. Clare assented with a faint smile.

"There has been a bad business of it this morning, though," said Mr. Radford, looking in Mrs. Clare's face; "I dare say you've heard all about it — over there, in the valley by Woodchurch and Redbrook Street."

Mrs. Clare looked alarmed; and Kate forgot her timidity, and exclaimed — "Oh! is he safe?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," answered Mr. Radford, in a kindly tone; "you need not alarm yourself. He was not in it, at all. I don't say he had no share in running the goods; for that is pretty well known, I believe; and he did his part of the work well; but the poor fellows who were bringing up the things, by some folly, or mistake, I do not know which, got in amongst the dragoons, were attacked, and nearly cut to pieces."

"Ay, then, that is what the soldiers are hanging about here for," said Mrs. Clare.

"It's a sad affair for me, indeed!" continued Mr. Radford, thoughtfully.

"I am truly sorry to hear that, Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Clare, "for you have been always very kind to me."

"Well, my good lady," replied her visitor, "perhaps you may now be able to do me a kindness in return," said Mr. Radford. "To tell you the truth, my son was in this affray. He made his escape when he found that they could not hold their ground; and it is for him that the soldiers are now looking — at least, I suspect so. Perhaps you may be able to give a little help, if he should be concealed about here?"

"That I will," said Widow Clare, "if it cost me one of my hands!"

"Oh, there will be no danger!" answered Mr. Radford; "I

only wish you, in case he should be lying where I think he is, to take care that he has food till he can get away. It might be better for Kate here, to go rather than yourself; or one could do it at one time, and the other at another. With a basket on her arm, and a few eggs at the top, Kate could trip across the wood as if she were going to Harbourne House. You could boil the eggs hard, you know, and put some bread and other things underneath. Then, at the place where I suppose he is, she could quietly put down the basket and walk on."

"But you must tell me where he is, Sir," answered Mrs. Clare.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Radford — "that is to say, I can tell you where I think he is. Then, when she gets near it, she can look round to see if there's any one watching, and if she sees no one, can say aloud — 'Do you want anything?' If he's there he'll answer; and should he send any message to me, one of you must bring it up. I shan't forget to repay you for your trouble."

"Oh dear, Sir, it isn't for that," said Mrs. Clare — "Kate and I will both be very glad, indeed, to show our gratitude for your kindness. It is seldom poor people have the opportunity; and I am sure, after good Sir Robert Croyland, we owe more to you than to any body."

"Sir Robert has been kind to you, I believe, Mrs. Clare!" replied Mr. Radford, with a peculiar expression of countenance. "Well he may be! He has not always been so kind to you and yours."

"Pray, Sir, do not say a word against Sir Robert!" answered the widow; "though he sometimes used to speak rather cross and angrily in former times, yet since my poor husband's death, nothing could be more kind than he has been. I owe him everything, Sir."

"Ay, it's all very well, Mrs. Clare," replied Mr. Radford, shaking his head with a doubtful smile — "it's all very well! However, I do not intend to say a word against Sir Robert Croyland. He's my very good friend, you know; and it's all very well. — Now let us talk about the place where you or Kate are to go; but, above all things, remember that you must not utter a word

about it to any one, either now or hereafter; for it might be the ruin of us all if you did."

"Oh, no — not for the world, Sir!" answered Mrs. Clare; "I know such places are not to be talked about; and nobody shall ever hear anything about it from us."

"Well, then," continued Mr. Radford, "you know the way up to Harbourne House, through the gardens. There's the little path to the right; and then, half way up that, there's one to the left, which brings you to the back of the stables. It goes between two sandy banks, you may recollect; and there's a little pond with a willow growing over it, and some bushes at the back of the willow. Well, just behind these bushes there is a deep hole in the bank, high enough to let a man stand upright in it, when he gets a little way down. It would make a famous *hide* if there were a better horse-path up to it, and sometimes it has been used for small things such as a man can carry on his back. Now, from what I have heard, my boy Richard must be in there; for his horse was found, it seems, not above two or three hundred yards from the house, broken-knee'd and knocked-up. If any one should follow you as you go, and make inquiries, you must say that you are going to the house; for there is a door there in the wall of the stable-yard — though that path is seldom, if ever used now; but, if there be nobody by, you can just set down the basket by the stump of the willow, and ask if he wants anything more. If he doesn't answer, speak again, and try at all events to find out whether he's there or not, so that I may hear."

"Oh, I know the place, quite well!" said Mrs. Clare. "My poor husband used to get gravel there. But when do you think I had better go, Sir? for if the dragoons are still lingering about, a thousand to one but they follow me, and, more likely still, may follow Kate; so I shall go myself to-night, at all events."

"You had better wait till it is duskish," answered Mr. Radford; "and then they'll soon lose sight of you amongst the trees; for they can't go up there on horseback, and if they stop to dismount you can easily get out of their way. Let me have any message you may get from Richard; and don't forget, either, if Harding comes up here, to tell him I want to speak with him very

much. He'll be sorry enough for this affair when he hears of it, for the loss is dreadful!"

"I'm sure he will, Sir," said Kate Clare; "for he was talking about something that he had to do, and said it would half kill him, if he did not get it done safely."

"Ay, he's a very good fellow," answered Mr. Radford, "and you shall have a wedding-gown from me, Kate. — Look out of the window, there's a good girl, and see if any of those dragoons are about."

Kate did as he bade her, and replied in the negative; and Mr. Radford, after giving a few more directions, mounted his horse and rode away, muttering as he went — "Ay, Master Harding, I have a strong suspicion of you; and I will soon satisfy myself. They must have had good information, which none could give but you, I think; so look to yourself, my friend. No man ever injured me yet who had not cause to repent it."

Mr. Radford forgot that he no longer possessed such extensive means of injuring others as he had formerly done; but the bitter will was as strong as ever.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE house of Mr. Zachary Croyland was not so large or ostentatious in appearance as that of his brother; but, nevertheless, it was a very roomy and comfortable house; and as he was naturally a man of fine taste — though somewhat singular in his likings and dislikings, as well in matters of art as in his friendships, and vehement in favour of particular schools, and in abhorrence of others — his dwelling was fitted up with all that could refresh the eye or improve the mind. A very extensive and well-chosen library covered the walls of one room, in which were also several choice pieces of sculpture; and his drawing-room was ornamented with a valuable collection of small pictures, into which not one single Dutch piece was admitted. He was accustomed to say, when any connoisseur objected to the total exclusion of a very fine school — "Don't mention it — don't mention it; I hate it in all its branches and all its styles. I have pictures for my own satisfaction, not

because they are worth a thousand pounds apiece. I hate to see men represented as like beasts as possible; or to refresh my eyes with swamps and canals; or, in the climate of England, which is dull enough of all conscience, to exhilarate myself with the view of a frozen pond and fields, as flat as a plate, covered with snow, while half-a-dozen boors, in red night-caps and red noses, are skating away in ten pairs of breeches — looking, in point of shape, exactly like hogs set upon their hind legs. It's all very true the artist may have shown very great talent; but that only shows him to be the greater fool for wasting his talents upon such subjects."

His collection, therefore, consisted almost entirely of the Italian schools, with a few Flemish, a few English, and one or two exquisite Spanish pictures. He had two good Murillos and a Velasquez, one or two fine Vandykes, and four sketches by Rubens of larger pictures. But he had numerous landscapes, and several very beautiful small paintings of the Bolognese school; though that on which he prided himself the most, was an exquisite Correggio.

It was in this room that he left his niece Edith when he set out for Woodchurch; and, as she sat — with her arm fallen somewhat listlessly over the back of the low sofa, the light coming in from the window strong upon her left cheek, and the rest in shade, with her rich colouring and her fine features, the high-toned expression of soul upon her brow, and the wonderful grace of her whole form and attitude — she would have made a fine study for any of those dead artists whose works lived around her.

She heard the wheels of the carriage roll away; but she gave no thought to the question of whither her uncle had gone, or why he took her not with him, as he usually did. She was glad of it, in fact; and people seldom reason upon that with which they are well pleased. Her whole mind was directed to her own situation, and to the feelings which the few words of conversation she had had with her sister had aroused. She thought of him she loved, with the intense, eager longing to behold him once more — but once, if so it must be — which perhaps only a woman's heart can fully know. To be near him, to hear him speak, to trace the features she had loved, to mark the traces of Time's hand, and the

lines that care and anxiety, and disappointment and regret, she knew must be busily working — oh, what a boon it would be! Then her mind ran on, led by the light hand of Hope, along the narrow bridge of association, to ask herself — if it would be such delight to see him and to hear him speak — what would it be to soothe, to comfort, to give him back to joy and peace!

The dream was too bright to last, and it soon faded. He was near her, and yet he did not come; he was in the same land, in the same district; he had gazed up to the house where she dwelt; if he had asked whose it was, the familiar name — the name once so dear — must have sounded in his ear; and yet he did not come. A few minutes of time, a few steps of his horse, would have brought him to where she was; but he had turned away, — and Edith's eyes filled with tears.

She rose and wiped them off, saying, "I will think of something else;" and she went up and gazed at a picture. It was a *Salvator Rosa* — a fine painting, though not by one of the finest masters. There was a rocky scene in front, with trees waving in the wind of a fierce storm, while two travellers stood beneath a bank and a writhing beech tree, scarcely seeming to find shelter even there from the large grey streams of rain that swept across the foreground. But, withal, in the distance were seen some majestic old towers and columns, with a gleam of golden light upon the edge of the sky; and Hope, never wearying of her kindly offices, whispered to Edith's heart, "In life, as in that picture, there may be sunshine behind the storm."

Poor Edith was right willing to listen; and she gave herself up to the gentle guide. "Perhaps," she thought, "his duty might not admit of his coming, or perhaps he might not know how he would be received. My father's anger would be sure to follow such a step. He might think that insult, injury, would be added. He might imagine even, that I am changed," and she shook her head, sadly. "Yet why should he not," she continued, "if I sit here and think so of him? Who can tell what people may have said? — Who can tell even what falsehoods may have been spread? Perhaps he's even now thinking of me. Perhaps he has come into this part of the country to make inquiries, to see with his own eyes, to

satisfy himself. Oh, it must be so — it must be so!" she cried, giving herself up again to the bright dream. "Ay, and this Sir Edward Digby, too, he is his dear friend, his companion, may he not have sent him down to investigate and judge? I thought it strange at the time, that this young officer should write to inquire after my father's family, and then instantly accept an invitation; and I marked how he gazed at that wretched young man and his unworthy father. Perhaps he will tell Zara more, and I shall hear when I return. Perhaps he has told her more already. Indeed, it is very probable, for they had a long ride together yesterday;" and poor Edith began to feel as anxious to go back to her father's house as she had been glad to quit it. Yet she saw no way how this could be accomplished, before the period allotted for her stay was at an end; and she determined to have recourse to a little simple art, and ask Mr. Croyland to take her over to Harbourne, on the following morning, with the ostensible purpose of looking for some article of apparel left behind, but, in truth, to obtain a few minutes' conversation with her sister.

There are times in the life of almost every one — at least, of every one of feeling and intellect — when it seems as if we could meditate for ever: when, without motion or change, the spirit within the earthly tabernacle could pause and ponder over deep subjects of contemplation for hour after hour, with the doors and windows of the senses shut, and without any communication with external things. The matter before us may be any of the strange and perplexing relations of man's mysterious being; or it may be some obscure circumstance of our own fate — some period of uncertainty and expectation — some of those Egyptian darknesses which from time to time come over the future, and which we gaze on half in terror, half in hope, discovering nothing, yet speculating still. The latter was the case at that moment with Edith Croyland; and, as she revolved every separate point of her situation, it seemed as if fresh wells of thought sprung up to flow on interminably.

She had continued thus during more than half an hour after her uncle's departure, when she heard a horse stop before the door of the house, and her heart beat, though she knew not

wherefore. Her lover might have come at length, indeed; but if that dream crossed her mind it was soon swept away; for the next instant she heard her father's voice, first inquiring for herself, and then asking, in a lower tone, if his brother was within. If Edith had felt hope before, she now felt apprehension; for during several years no private conversation had taken place between her father and herself without bringing with it grief and anxiety, harsh words spoken, and answers painful for a child to give.

It seldom happens that fear does not go beyond reality; but such was not the case in the present instance; for Edith Croyland had to undergo far more than she expected. Her father entered the room where she sat, with a slow step and a stern and determined look. His face was very pale, too; his lips themselves seemed bloodless, and the terrible emotions which were in his heart showed themselves upon his countenance by many an intelligible but indescribable sign. As soon as Edith saw him, she thought, "He has heard of Henry's return to this country. It is that which has brought him;" and she nerved her heart for a new struggle; but still she could scarcely prevent her limbs from shaking, as she rose and advanced to meet her parent.

Sir Robert Croyland drew her to him, and kissed her tenderly enough; for, in truth, he loved her very dearly: and then he led her back to the sofa, and seated himself beside her.

"How low these abominable contrivances are," he said; "I do wish that Zachary would have some sofas that people can sit upon with comfort, instead of these beastly things, only fit for a Turkish harem, or a dog-kennel."

Edith made no reply; for she waited in dread of what was to follow, and could not speak of trifles. But her father presently went on, saying, "So, my brother is out, and not likely to return for an hour or two! — Well, I am glad of it, Edith; for I came over to speak with you on matters of much moment."

Still Edith was silent; for she durst not trust her voice with any reply. She feared that her courage would give way at the first words, and that she should burst into tears, when she felt sure that all the resolution she could command, would be required to bear her safely through. She trusted, indeed, that, as she had

often found before, her spirit would rise with the occasion, and that she should find powers of resistance within her in the time of need, though she shrunk from the contemplation of what was to come.

“I have delayed long, Edith,” continued Sir Robert Croyland, after a pause, “to press you upon a subject in regard to which it is now absolutely necessary you should come to a decision; — too long, indeed; but I have been actuated by a regard for your feelings, and you owe me something for my forbearance. There can now, however, be no further delay. You will easily understand, that I mean your marriage with Richard Radford.”

Edith raised her eyes to her father’s face, and, after a strong effort, replied, “My decision, my dear father, has, as you know, been long made. I cannot, and I will not, marry him — nothing on earth shall ever induce me!”

“Do not say that, Edith,” answered Sir Robert Croyland, with a bitter smile; “for I could utter words, which, if I know you rightly, would make you glad and eager to give him your hand, even though you broke your heart in so doing. But before I speak those things which will plant a wound in your bosom for life, that nothing can heal or assuage, I will try every other means. I request you — I intreat you — I command you, to marry him! By every duty that you owe me — by all the affection that a child ought to feel for a father, I beseech you to do so, if you would save me from destruction and despair!”

“I cannot! I cannot!” said Edith, clasping her hands. “Oh! why should you drive me to such painful disobedience? In the first place, can I promise to love a man that I hate, to honour and obey one whom I despise, and whose commands can never be for good? But still more, my father, — you must hear me out, for you force me to speak — you force me to tear open old wounds, to go back to times long past, and to recur to things bitter to you and to me. I cannot marry him, as I told you once before; for I hold myself to be the wife of another.”

“Folly and nonsense!” cried Sir Robert Croyland, angrily, “you are neither his wife, nor he your husband. What! the wife of a man who has never sought you for years — who has cast you

off, abandoned you, made no inquiry for you? — The marriage was a farce. You read a ceremony which you had no right to read, you took vows which you had no power to take. The law of the land pronounces all such engagements mere pieces of empty foolery!”

“But the law of God,” replied Edith, “tells us to keep vows that we have once made. To those vows, I called God to witness with a true and sincere heart; and with the same heart, and the same feelings, I will keep them! I did wrong, my father — I know I did wrong — and Henry did wrong too; but by what we have done we must abide; and I dare not, I cannot be the wife of another.”

“But, I tell you, you shall!” exclaimed her father vehemently. “I will compel you to be so; I will over-rule this obstinate folly, and make you obedient, whether you choose it or not.”

“Nay, nay — not so!” cried Edith. “You could not do, you would not attempt, so cruel a thing!”

“I will, so help me Heaven!” exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland.

“Then, thank Heaven,” answered his daughter, in a low but solemn voice, “it is impossible! In this country, there is no clergyman who would perform the ceremony contrary to my expressed dissent. If I break the vows that I have taken, it must be my own voluntary act; for there is not any force that can compel me so to do; and I call Heaven to witness, that, even if you were to drag me to the altar, I would say, No, to the last!”

“Rash, mad, unfeeling girl!” cried her father, starting up, and gazing upon her with a look in which rage, and disappointment, and perplexity were all mingled.

He stood before her for a moment in silence, and then strode vehemently backwards and forwards in the room, with his right hand contracting and expanding, as if grasping at something. “It must be done!” he said, at length, pressing his hand upon his brow; “it must be done!” and then he recommenced his silent walk, with the shadows of many emotions coming over his countenance.

When he returned to Edith's side again, the manner and the aspect of Sir Robert Croyland were both changed. There was an expression of deep sorrow upon his countenance, of much agitation, but considerable tenderness; and, to his daughter's surprise, he took her hand in his, and pressed it affectionately.

"Edith," he said, after a short interval of silence, "I have commanded, I have insisted, I have threatened — but all in vain. Yet, in so doing, I have had in view to spare you even greater pain than could be occasioned by a father's sternness. My very love for you, my child, made me seem wanting in love. But now I must inflict the greater pain. You require, it seems, inducements stronger than obedience to a father's earnest commands, and you shall have them, however terrible for me to speak and you to hear. I will tell you all, and leave you to judge."

Edith gazed at him in surprise and terror. "Oh, do not — do not, Sir!" she said; "do not try to break my heart, and put my duty to you in opposition to the fulfilment of a most sacred vow — in opposition to all the dictates of my own heart and my own conscience."

"Edith, it must be done," replied Sir Robert Croyland. "I have urged you to a marriage with young Richard Radford. I now tell you solemnly that your father's life depends upon it."

Edith clasped her hands wildly together, and gazed, for a moment, in his face, without a word, almost stupified with horror. But Sir Robert Croyland had deceived her, or attempted to deceive her, on the very same subject they were now discussing, more than once already. She knew it; and of course she doubted; for those who have been once false are never fully believed — those who have been once deceived are always suspicious of those who have deceived them, even when they speak the truth. As thought and reflection came back after the first shock, Edith found much cause to doubt: she could not see how such a thing was possible — how her refusal of Richard Radford could affect her father's life; and she replied, after a time, in a hesitating tone, "How can that be? — I do not understand it. — I do not see how —"

"I will tell you," replied Sir Robert Croyland, in a low and peculiarly-quiet voice, which had something fearful in it to his

daughter's ear. "It is a long story, Edith; but you must hear it all, my child. You shall be your father's confidant — his only one. You shall share the secret, dreadful as it is, which has embittered his whole existence, rendered his days terrible, his nights sleepless, his bed a couch of fire."

Edith trembled in every limb; and Sir Robert, rising, crossed over and opened the door of the drawing-room, to see that there were none of the servants near it. Then closing it again, he returned to her side, and proceeded, holding her hand in his: "You must have remarked," he said, "and perhaps often wondered, my dear child, that Mr. Radford, a man greatly below myself in station, whose manners are repulsive and disagreeable, whose practices I condemn and reprobate, whose notions and principles I abhor, has exercised over me for many years an influence which no other person possesses, that he has induced me to do many things which my better sense and better feelings disapproved, that he has even led me to consent that my best-loved daughter should become the wife of his son, and to urge her to be so at the expense of all her feelings. You have seen all this, Edith, and wondered. Is it not so?"

"I have, indeed," murmured Edith. "I have been by no means able to account for it."

"Such will not be the case much longer, Edith," replied Sir Robert Croyland. "I am making my confession, my dear child; and you shall hear all. I must recur, too, to the story of young Layton. You know well that I liked and esteemed him; and although I was offended, as I justly might be, at his conduct towards yourself, and thought fit to show that I disapproved, yet at first, and from the first, I determined, if I saw the attachment continue and prove real and sincere, to sacrifice all feelings of pride, and all considerations of fortune, and when you were of a fit age, to confirm the idle ceremony which had passed between you, by a real and lawful marriage."

"Oh, that was kind and generous of you, my dear father. What could make you change so suddenly and fatally? You must have seen that the attachment was true and lasting; you must have

known that Henry was in every way calculated to make your daughter happy."

"You shall hear, Edith — you shall hear," replied her father. "Very shortly after the event of which I have spoken, another occurred, of a dark and terrible character, only known to myself and one other. I was somewhat irritable at that time. My views and prospects with regard to yourself were crossed; and although I had taken the resolution I have mentioned, vexation and disappointment had their effect upon my mind. Always passionate, I gave way more to my passion than I had ever done before; and the result was a fatal and terrible one. You may remember poor Clare, the gamekeeper. He had offended me on the Monday morning; and I had used violent and angry language towards him before his companions, threatening to punish him in a way he did not expect. On the following day, we went out again to shoot — he and I alone together — and, on our way back, we passed through a little wood, which lies —"

"Oh, stop — stop!" cried Edith, covering her eyes with her hands. "Do not tell me any more!"

Her father was not displeased to see her emotion, for it answered his purpose. Yet, it must not be supposed that the peculiar tone and manner which he assumed, so different from anything that had been seen in his demeanour for years, was affected as a means to an end. Such was not the case. Sir Robert Croyland was now true, in manner and in words, though it was the first time that he had been entirely so for many years. There had been a terrible struggle before he could make up his mind to speak; but yet, when he did begin, it was a relief to him, to unburthen the overloaded breast, even to his own child. It softened him; it made his heart expand; it took the chain off long-imprisoned feelings, and gave a better spirit room to make its presence felt. He did not forget his object, indeed. To save himself from a death of horror, from accusation, from disgrace, was still his end; but the means by which he proposed to seek it were gentler. He even wavered in his resolution: he fancied that he could summon fortitude to leave the decision to Edith herself, and that if that decision were against him, would dare and bear the

worst. But still he was pleased to see her moved; for he thought that she could never hear the whole tale, and learn his situation fully, without rushing forward to extricate him; and he went on — “Nay, Edith, now the statement has been begun, it must be concluded,” he said. “You would hear, and you must hear all. You know the wood I speak of, I dare say — a little to the left of Chequer-tree?”

“Oh, yes!” murmured Edith, “where poor Clare was found.”

The baronet nodded his head; “It was there, indeed,” he said. “We went down to see if there were any snipes, or wild fowl, in the bottom. It is a deep and gloomy-looking dell, with a pond of water and some rushes in the hollow, and a little brook running through it, having tall trees all around, and no road but one narrow path crossing it. As we came down, I thought I saw the form of a man move amongst the trees; and I fancied that some one was poaching there. I told Clare to go round the pond and see, while I watched the road. He did not seem inclined to go, saying, that he had not remarked anybody, but that the people round about said the place was haunted. I had been angry with him the whole morning, and a good deal out of humour with many things; so I told him to go round instantly, and not make me any answer. The man did so, in a somewhat slow and sullen humour, I thought, and returned sooner than I fancied he ought to do, saying that he could see no trace of any one. I was now very angry, for I fancied he neglected his duty. I told him that he was a liar, that I had perceived some one, whom he might have perceived as well, and that my firm belief was, he was in alliance with the poachers, and deserved to be immediately discharged. ‘Well, Sir Robert,’ he said, ‘in regard to discharging me, that is soon settled. I will not stay another day in your service, after I have a legal right to go. As to being a liar, I am none; and as to being in league with the poachers, if you say so, you yourself lie!’ Such were his words, or words to that effect. I got furious at his insolence, though perhaps, Edith — perhaps I provoked it myself — at least, I have thought so since. However, madly giving way to rage, I took my gun by the barrel to knock him down. A

struggle ensued; for he caught hold of the weapon in my hand; and how I know not, but the gun went off, and Clare fell back upon the turf. What would I not have done then, to recall every hasty word I had spoken! But it was in vain. I stooped over him; I spoke to him; I told him how sorry I was for what had happened. But he made no answer, and pressed his hand upon his right side, where the charge had entered. I was mad with despair and remorse. I knew not where to go, or what to do. The man was evidently dying; for his face had grown pale and sharp; and after trying to make him speak, and beseeching him to answer one word, I set off running as fast as I could towards the nearest village for assistance. As I was going, I saw a man on horseback, riding sharply down towards the very place. He was at some distance from me; but I easily recognised Mr. Radford, and knew that he must pass by the spot where the wounded man lay. I comforted myself with thinking that Clare would get aid without my committing myself; and I crept in amongst the trees at the edge of the wood, to make sure that Mr. Radford saw him, and to watch their proceedings. Quietly and stealthily finding my way through the bushes, I came near; and then I saw that Radford was kneeling by Clare's side with an inkhorn in his hand, which, with his old tradesmanlike-habits, he used always at that time to carry about him. He was writing busily, and I could hear Clare speak, but could not distinguish what he said. The state of my mind, at that moment, I cannot describe. It was more like madness than any thing else. Vain and foolish is it, for any man or any body of men, to argue what would be their conduct in trying situations which they have never been placed in. It is worse than folly for them to say, what would naturally be another man's conduct in any circumstances; for no man can tell another's character, or understand fully all the fine shades of feeling or emotion that may influence him. The tale I am telling you now, Edith, is true — too true, in all respects. I was very wrong, certainly; but I was not guilty of the man's murder. I never intended to fire: I never tried to fire; and yet, perhaps, I acted, afterwards, as if I had been guilty, or at all events in a way that was well calculated to make people believe I was so. But I was mad at the time

— mad with agitation and grief—and every man, I believe, in moments of deep emotion is mad, more or less. However, I crept out of the wood again, and hastened on, determined to leave the man to the care of Mr. Radford, but with all my thoughts wild and confused, and no definite line of conduct laid out for myself. Before I had gone a mile, I began to think what a folly I had committed, that I should have joined Radford at once; that I should have been present to hear what the man said, and to give every assistance in my power, although it might be ineffectual, in order to stanch the blood and save his life. As soon as these reflections arose, I determined, though late, to do what I should have done at first; and, turning my steps, I walked back at a quick pace. Ere I got half way to the top of the hill which looks down upon the wood, I saw Radford coming out again on horseback; but I went on, and met him. As soon as he beheld me he checked his horse, which was going at a rapid rate, and when I came near, dismounted to speak with me. We were then little more than common acquaintances, and I had sometimes dealt hardly with him in his different transactions; but he spoke in a friendly tone, saying, ‘This is a sad business, Sir Robert; but if you will take my advice you will go home as quickly as you can, and say nothing to any one till you see me. I will be with you in an hour or so. At present I must ride up to Middle Quarter, and get down men to carry home the body.’ With a feeling I cannot express, I asked, if he were dead, then. He nodded his head significantly, and when I was going to put further questions, he grasped my hand, saying, ‘Go home, Sir Robert—go home. I shall say nothing about the matter to any one, till I see you, except that I found him dying in the wood. His gun was discharged,’ he continued, ‘so there is no proof that he did not do it himself!’ Little did I know what a fiend he was, into whose power I was putting myself.”

“Oh, Heaven!” cried Edith, who had been listening with her head bent down till her whole face was nearly concealed, “I see it all, now! I see it all!”

“No, dear child,” replied Sir Robert Croyland, in a voice sad and solemn, but wonderfully calm, “you cannot see it all; no,

nor one thousandth part of what I have suffered. Even the next dreadful three hours — for he was fully that time ere he came to Harbourne — were full of horror, inconceivable to any one but to him who endured them. At length, he made his appearance; calm, grave, self-possessed, with nought of his somewhat rude and blustering manner, and announced, with an affectation of feeling to the family, that poor Clare, my keeper, had been found dying with a wound in his side.”

“I recollect the day, well!” said Edith, shuddering.

“Do you not remember, then,” said Sir Robert Croyland, “that he and I went into my writing-room — that awful room, which well deserves the old prison name of the room of torture! We were closeted there for nearly two hours; and all he said I cannot repeat. His tone, however, was the most friendly in the world. He professed the greatest interest in me and in my situation; and he told me that he had come to see me before he said a word to any one, because he wished to take my opinion as to how he was to proceed. It was necessary, he said, that I should know the facts, for, unfortunately they placed me in a very dangerous situation, which he was most anxious to free me from; and then he went on to tell me, that when he had come up, poor Clare was perfectly sensible, and had his speech distinctly. ‘As a magistrate,’ he continued, ‘I thought it right immediately to take his dying deposition, for I saw that he had not many minutes to live. Here it is,’ he said, showing his pocket-book; ‘and, as I luckily always have pen and ink with me, I knelt down, and wrote his words from his own lips. He had strength enough to sign the paper; and, as you may see, there is the mark of blood from his own hand, which he had been pressing on his side.’ I would fain have taken the paper, but he would not let me, saying, that he was bound to keep it; and then he went on, and read the contents. In it, the unfortunate man charged me most wrongfully with having shot him in a fit of passion; and, moreover, he said that he had been sure, beforehand, that I would do it, as I had threatened him on the preceding day, and there were plenty of people who could prove it.”

“Oh, how dreadful!” cried Edith.

“It was false, as I have a soul to be saved!” cried Sir Robert Croyland. “But Mr. Radford then went on, and, shrugging his shoulders, said, that he was placed in a very delicate and painful situation, and that he did not really know how to act with regard to the deposition. ‘Put it in the fire!’ I exclaimed — ‘put it in the fire!’ But he said, ‘No; every man must consider himself in these things, Sir Robert. I have my own character and reputation to think of — my own duty. I risk a great deal, you must recollect, by concealing a thing of this kind. I do not know that I don’t put my own life in danger; for this is clear and conclusive evidence against you, and you know, what it is to be accessory in a case of murder!’ I then told him my own story, Edith; and he said, that made some difference, indeed. He was sure I would tell him the truth; but yet he must consider himself in the matter; and he added hints which I could not mistake, that his evidence was to be bought off. I offered anything he pleased to name, and the result was such as you may guess. He exacted that I should mortgage my estate, as far as it could be mortgaged, and make over the proceeds to him, and that I should promise to give your hand to his son. I promised anything, my child; for not only life and death, but honour or disgrace, were in the balance. If he had asked my life, I would have held my throat to the knife a thousand times sooner than have made such sacrifices. But to die the death of a felon, Edith — to be hanged — to writhe in the face of a grinning and execrating multitude — to have my name handed down in the annals of crime, as the man who had been executed for the murder of his own servant, — I could not bear that, my child; and I promised anything! He kept the paper, he said, as a security; and, at first, it was to be given to me, to do with it as I liked — when the money coming from the mortgage was secretly made over to him; but then, he said, that he had lost one great hold, and must keep it till the marriage was completed: for by this time the coroner’s inquest was over, and he had withheld the deposition, merely testifying that he had found the man at the point of death in the wood, and had gone as fast as possible for assistance. The jury consisted of his tenants and mine, and they were easily satisfied; but the fiend who had me in his power was more greedy; and,

by the very exercise of his influence, he seemed to learn to enjoy it. Day after day, month after month, he took a pleasure in making me do things that were abhorrent to me. It changed my nature and my character. He forced me to wink at frauds that I detested; and every year he pressed for the completion of your marriage with his son. Your coldness, your dislike, your refusal would, long ere this, have driven him into fury, I believe, if Richard Radford had been eager for your hand himself. But now, Edith — now, my child, he will hear of no more delay. He is ruined in fortune, disappointed in his expectations, and rendered fierce as a hungry beast by some events that have taken place this morning. He has just now been over at Harbourn, and used threats which I know, too well, he will execute. He it was, himself, who told me to inform you, that if you did not consent, your father's life would be the sacrifice!"

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Edith, covering her eyes with her hands, "at least, give me time to think. — Surely, his word cannot have such power: a base, notorious criminal himself, one who every day violates the law, who scoffs at his own oaths, and holds truth and honour but as names — surely his word will be nothing against Sir Robert Croyland's."

"His word is nothing, would be nothing," replied her father, earnestly; "but that deposition, Edith! It is that which is my destruction. Remember, that the words of a dying man, with eternity and judgment close before his eyes, are held by the law more powerful than any other kind of evidence; and, besides, there are those still living, who heard the rash threat I used. Suspicion once pointed at me, a thousand corroborative circumstances would come forth to prove that the tale I told of parting with the dead man, some time before, was false, and that very fact would condemn me. Cast away all such hopes, Edith — cast away all such expectations. They are vain! — vain! Look the truth full in the face, my child. This man has your father's life entirely and totally in his power, and ask yourself, if you will doom me to death."

"Oh, give me time — give me time!" cried Edith, wringing her hands. "Let me but think over it till to-morrow, or next day."

"Not an hour ago," replied Sir Robert Croyland, "he swore,

by everything he holds sacred, that if before twelve to-night, he did not receive your consent —”

“Stay, stay!” cried Edith, eagerly, placing her hand upon her brow. “Let me think — let me think. It is but money that he wants — it is but the pitiful wealth my uncle left me. Let him take it, my father!” she continued, laying her hand upon Sir Robert’s arm, and gazing brightly in his face, as if the light of hope had suddenly been renewed. “Let him take it all, every farthing. I would sooner work as a hired servant in the fields for my daily bread, with the only comfort of innocence and peace, than break my vows, and marry that bad man. I will sign a promise this instant that he shall have all.”

Sir Robert Croyland threw his arms round her, and looked up to Heaven, as if imploring succour for them both. “My sweet child! — My dear child!” he said, with the tears streaming down his cheeks. “But I cannot leave you even this generous hope. This man has other designs. I offered — I promised to give Zara to his son, and to ensure to her, with my brother’s help, a fortune equal to your own. But he would not hear of it. He has other views, my Edith. You must know all — you must see all as it really is. He will keep his word this very night! If before twelve, he do not receive your consent, the intimation of the fatal knowledge he possesses will be sent to those who will not fail to track it through every step, as the bloodhound follows his prey. He is a desperate man, Edith, and will keep his word, bringing down ruin upon our heads, even if it overwhelm himself also.”

Edith Croyland paused without reply for several minutes, her beautiful face remaining pale, with the exception of one glowing spot in the centre of her cheek. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground; and her lips moved, but without speech. She was arguing in her own mind the case between hope and despair; and the terrible array of circumstances on every side bewildered her. Delay was her only refuge; and looking up in her father’s face, she said, “But why is he so hasty? Why cannot he wait a few hours longer? I will fix a time when my answer shall be given — it shall be shortly, very shortly — this time to-morrow. Surely,

surely, in so terrible a case, I may be allowed a few hours to think — a short, a very short period, to decide.”

“He will admit of no more than I have said,” answered Sir Robert Croyland: “it is as vain to entreat him, as to ask the hangman to delay his fatal work. He is hard as iron, without feeling, without heart. His reasons, too, are specious, my dear child. His son, it seems, has taken part this morning in a smuggling affray with the troops — blood has been shed — some of the soldiers have been killed — all who have had a share therein are guilty of felony; and it has become necessary that the young man should be hurried out of the country without delay. To him such a flight is nothing: he has no family to blacken with the record of crime — he has no honourable name to stain — his means are all prepared; his flight is easy, his escape secure; but his father insists that you shall be his bride before he goes, or he gives your father up, not to justice, but to the law — which in pretending to administer justice, but too often commits the very crimes it seems to punish. Four short days are all that he allows; and then you are to be that youth’s bride.”

“What! the bride of a felon!” cried Edith, her spirit rising for a moment — “of one stained with every vice and every crime — to vow falsely that I will love him whom I must ever hate — to break all my promises to one I must ever love — to deceive, prove false and forsworn to the noble and the true, and give myself to the base, the lawless, and the abhorred! Oh, my father — my father! is it possible that you can ask such a thing?”

The fate of Sir Robert Croyland and his daughter hung in the balance. One harsh command, one unkind word, with justice and truth on her side, and feebleness and wrong on his, might have armed her to resist; but the old man’s heart was melted. The struggle that he witnessed in his child was, for a moment — remark, only for a moment — more terrible than that within his own breast. There was something in the innocence and truth, something in the higher attributes of the passions called into action in her breast, something in the ennobling nature of the conflicting feelings of her heart — the filial tenderness, the adherence to her engagements, the abhorrence of the bad, the love

of the good, the truth, the honour, and the piety, all striving one with the other, that for a time made the mean passion of fear seem small and insignificant. "I do not ask you, my child," he said — "I do not urge you — I ask, I urge you no more! The worst bitterness is past. I have told my own child the tale of my sorrows, my folly, my weakness, and my danger. I have inflicted the worst upon you, Edith, and on myself; and I leave it to your own heart to decide. After your generous, your noble offer, to sacrifice your property and leave yourself nothing, for my sake, it were cruel — it were, indeed, base, to urge you farther. To avoid this dreadful disclosure, to shelter you and myself from such horrible details, I have often been stern, and harsh, and menacing. — Forgive me, Edith, but it is past! You now know what is on the die; and it is your own hand casts it. Your father's life, the honour of your family, the high name we have ever borne — these are to be lost and won. But I urge it not — I ask it not. You only must and can decide."

Edith, who had risen, stood before him, pale as ashes, with her hands clasped so tight that the blood retreated from her fingers, where they pressed against each other, leaving them as white as those of the dead — her eyes fixed, straining, but sightless, upon the ground. All that she saw, all that she knew, all that she felt, was the dreadful alternative of fates before her. It was more than her frame could bear — it was more than almost any human heart could endure. To condemn a father to death, to bring the everlasting regret into her heart, to wander, as if accursed, over the earth, with a parent's blood crying out for vengeance! It was a terrible thought indeed. Then again, she remembered the vows that she had taken, the impossibility of performing those that were asked of her, the sacrifice of the innocent to the guilty, the perjury that she must commit, the dark and dreadful future before her, the self-reproach that stood on either hand to follow her through life! She felt as if her heart was bursting; and the next moment, all the blood seemed to fly from it, and leave it cold and motionless. She strove to speak — her voice was choked; but then, again, she made an effort; and a few words broke forth, convulsively — "To save you, my

father, I would do anything," she cried. "*I will* do anything — but —"

She could not finish; her sight failed her; her heart seemed crushed; her head swam; the colour left her lips; and she fell prone at her father's feet, without one effort to save herself.

Sir Robert Croyland's first proceeding was, to raise her and lay her on the sofa; but before he called any one, he gazed at her a moment or two in silence. "She has fainted," he said. "Poor child! — Poor girl!" But then came another thought: "She said she would do anything," he murmured; "her words were, '*I will.*' — It is surely a consent."

He forgot — he heeded not — he would not heed, that she had added, "*But —*"

"Yes, it was a consent," he repeated; "it must have been a consent. I will hasten to tell him. If we can but gain a few days, it is something. Who can say what a few days may bring? At all events, it is a relief. — It will obtain the delay she wished — I will tell him. — It must have been a consent;" and calling the servants and Edith's own maid, to attend upon her, he hastened out of the house, fearful of waiting till her senses returned, lest other words should snatch from him the interpretation he chose to put upon those which had gone before. In an instant, however, he returned, went into the library, and wrote down on a scrap of paper: —

"Thanks, dearest Edith! — thanks! I go in haste to tell Mr. Radford the promise you have given."

Then hurrying out again, he put the paper, which he had folded up, into the hands of the groom, who held his horse. "That for Miss Croyland," he said, "when she has quite recovered; but not before;" and, mounting with speed, he rode away as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was two o'clock when Sir Robert Croyland left his daughter; and Edith, with the aid of her maid, soon recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen. At first she hardly knew where

she was, or what had taken place. All seemed strange to her; for she had never fainted before; and though she had more than once seen her sister in the state in which she herself had just been, yet she did not apply what she had witnessed in others to explain her own sensations.

When she could rise from the sofa, where her father had laid her, and thought and recollection returned, Edith's first inquiry was for Sir Robert; and the servant's answer that he had been gone a quarter of an hour, was at first a relief. But Edith sat and pondered for a while, applying herself to call to mind all the last words which had been spoken. As she did so, a fear came over her — a fear that her meaning might have been mistaken. "No!" she murmured, at length — "no! I said, *but* — he must have heard it. — I cannot break those vows — I dare not; I would do anything to save him — oh, yes, doom myself to wretchedness for life; but I cannot, unless Henry gives me back my promise. — Poor Henry! what right have I to make him suffer too? — Yet does he suffer? — But a father's life — a father's life! That must not be the sacrifice! — Leave me, Caroline — I am better now!" she continued aloud; "it is very foolish to faint in this way. It never happened to me before."

"Oh dear, Miss Edith! it happens to every one now and then," said the maid, who had been in her service long; "and I am sure all Sir Robert said to you to-day, was enough to make you."

"Good Heaven!" cried Edith; in alarm, "did you hear?"

"I could not help hearing a part, Miss Edith;" answered the maid; "for in that little room, where I sit to be out of the way of all the black fellows, one hears very plain what is said here. There was once a door, I believe, and it is only just covered over."

For a moment, Edith sat mute in consternation; but at length demanded, "What did you hear? Tell me all, Caroline — every word, if you would ever have me regard you more."

"Oh, it was not much, Miss!" replied the maid; "I heard Sir Robert twice say, his life depended on it — and I suppose he meant, on your marrying young Mr. Radford. Then he seemed to tell you a long story; but I did not hear the whole of that; for I

did not try, I can assure you, Miss Edith; and then I heard you say, 'To save you, my father, I would do anything — I *will* do anything, but —' and then you stopped in the middle, because I suppose you fainted."

Edith put her hands before her eyes and thought, or tried to think; for her ideas were still in sad confusion. "Leave me now, Caroline," she said; "but, remember, I expect that no part of any conversation you have overheard between me and my father, will ever be repeated."

"Oh dear, no, Miss Edith," replied the woman, "I would not on any account;" and she left the room.

We all know of what value are ordinary promises of secrecy, even in the best society, as it is called. Nine times out of ten, there is one dear friend to whom everything is revealed; and that dear friend has others; and at each remove, the bond of secrecy is weaker and more weak, till the whole world is made a hearer of the tale. Now Edith's maid was a very discreet person; and when she promised not to reveal what she had heard, she only proposed to herself, to tell it to one person in the world. Nor was that person her lover, or her friend, or her fellow-servant; nor was she moved by the spirit of gossip, but really and truly by a love for her young lady, which was great, and by a desire to serve her. Thus, she thought, as soon as she had shut the door, "I will tell it to Miss Zara, though; for it is but right that she should know how they are driving her sister to marry a man she hates, as well she may. Miss Zara is active and quick, and may find some means of helping her."

The maid had not been gone a minute, when she returned with the short note which Sir Robert Croyland had left; and as she handed it to her young mistress, she watched her countenance eagerly. But Edith took it, read it, and gazed upon the paper without a word.

"Pray, Miss Edith," said the maid, "are you likely to want me soon; for I wish to go up to the village for something?"

"No, Caroline — no," answered Edith, with an absent air; "I shall not want you;" and she remained standing with the paper in her hand, and her eyes fixed upon it.

The powers by which volition acts upon the mind, and in what volition really consists, are mysteries which have never yet, that I have seen, been explained. Yet certain it is, that there is something within us which, when the intellectual faculties seem, under the pressure of circumstances, to lose their functions, can by a great effort compel them to return to their duty, rally them, and array them, as it were, against the enemy by whom they have been routed. Edith Croyland made the effort, and succeeded. She had been taken by surprise, and overcome; but now she collected all the forces of her mind, and prepared to fight the battle over again. In a few minutes, she became calm, and applied herself to consider fully her own situation. There were filial duty and tenderness on one side — love and a strong vow on the other. “He has gone to tell Mr. Radford that I have consented,” was her first distinct thought, “but his having mistaken me, must not make me give that consent when it is wrong. Were it myself alone, I would sacrifice all for him — I could but die — a few hours of misery are not much to bear — I have borne many. But I am bound — Good God! what an alternative!”

But I will not follow her thoughts: they can easily be conceived. She was left alone, with no one to counsel, with no one to aid her. The fatal secret she possessed was a bar to asking advice from any one. Buried in her own bosom, the causes of her conduct, the motives upon which she acted, must ever be secret, whatever course she pursued. Agony was on either hand. She had to choose between two terrible alternatives: on the one hand a breach of all her engagements, a few years, a few weeks, perhaps, of misery, and an early death — for such she knew must be her fate: and, on the other, a life, with love certainly to cheer it, but poisoned by the remembrance that she had sacrificed her father. Yet Edith now thought firmly, weighed, considered all.

She could come to no determination. Between two such gulfs, she shrank trembling from either.

The clock in the hall, with its clear, sharp bell, struck three; and the moment after, the quick sound of horses' feet was heard. “Can it be my father?” she thought. “No! he has not had

time — unless he has doubted;” but while she asked herself the question, the horses stopped at the door, the bell rang; and she went on to say to herself, “perhaps it is Zara. That would be a comfort indeed, though I cannot tell her — I must not tell her all.”

The old Hindoo opened the door, saying “Missy, a gentleman want to see you — very fine gentleman.”

Edith could not speak; but she bowed her head, and the servant, receiving that token as assent, turned to some one behind him and said, “Walk in, Sir.”

For a moment or two, Edith did not raise her eyes, and her lips moved. She heard a step in the room, that made her heart flutter; she heard the door shut; but yet for an instant she remained with her head bent, and her hands clasped together. Then she looked up. Standing before her, and gazing intently upon her, was a tall handsome man, dressed in the splendid uniform of the dragoons of that time, and with a star upon his left breast — a decoration worn by persons who had the right to do so, more frequently in those days than at the present time. But it was to the face that Edith’s eyes were turned — to the countenance well known and deeply loved. Changed though it was — grave where it had been gay, pale where it had been florid, sterner in the lines, once so full of gentle youth — still all the features were there, and the expression too, though saddened, was the same.

He gazed on her with a look full of tenderness and love; and their eyes met. On both of them the feelings of other years seemed to rush with overpowering force. The interval which had since occurred, for a moment, was annihilated; the heart went back with the rapid wing of Memory, to the hours of joy that were gone; and Layton opened wide his arms, exclaiming, “Edith! Edith!”

She could not resist. She had no power to struggle. Love, stronger than herself, was master; and, starting up, she cast herself upon his bosom, and there wept.

“Dear, dear girl!” he said, “then you love me still, — then Digby’s assurance is true — then you have not forgotten poor

Harry Layton — then his persevering hope, his long endurance, his unwavering love, his efforts, his success, have not been all in vain! — Dear, dear Edith! This hour repays me for all — for all. Dangers and adversities, and wounds, and anguish of body and of mind, and sleepless nights, and days of bitter thought — I would endure them all. All? — ay, tenfold all — for this one hour!” and he pressed her closer and closer to his heart.

“Nay, Harry — nay,” cried Edith, still clinging to him; “but hear me, hear me — or if you speak such words of tenderness, you will break my heart, or drive me mad.”

“Good Heaven!” exclaimed Layton, unclasping his arms, “what is it that you say? Edith — my Edith — my own, my vowed, my bride! But now, you seemed to share the joy you gave, — to love, as you are loved; and now —”

“I do love you — oh! I do love you!” cried Edith, vehemently; “add not a doubt of that to all I suffer. Ever, ever have I loved you, without change, without thought of change. But yet — but yet —. I may have fancied that you have forgotten me — I may have thought it strange that you did not write — that my letters remained unanswered; but still I loved, still I have been true to you.”

“I did write, my Edith. I received no letters,” said Layton, sadly; “we have both been wronged, my dear girl. My letters were returned in a cover directed in your own hand: but that trick I understand — that I see through. Oh, do not let any one deceive you again, beloved girl! You have been my chief — I might say my *only* thought; for the memory of you has mingled with every other idea, and made the whole your own. In the camp and in the field, I have endured and fought for Edith; in the council and in the court, I have struggled and striven for her; she has been the end and object of every effort, the ruling power of my whole mind. And now, Edith — now your soldier has returned to you. He has won every step towards the crowning reward of his endeavours; he has risen to competence, to command, to some honour in the service of his country; and he can proudly say to her he loves, Cast from you the fortune for which men dared to think I sought you — come to your lover, come to your husband, as dowerless as he

was when they parted us; and let all the world see and know, that it was your love, not your wealth, I coveted — this dear hand, that dear heart, not base gold, that I desired. Oh, Edith, in Heaven's name, cast me not now headlong down from the height of hope and joy to which you have raised me, for fear a heart and spirit, too long depressed, should never find strength to rise again."

Edith staggered back and sank down upon the sofa, covering her eyes, and only murmuring — "I do love you, Harry, beyond life itself. — Oh, that I were dead! — oh, that I were dead!"

There was a terrible struggle in Henry Layton's bosom. He could not understand the agitation that he witnessed; had it borne anything like the character of joy, even of surprise, all would have been clear; but it was evidently very different. It was joy overborne by sorrow. It was evidently a struggle of love with some influence, perhaps not stronger, yet terrible in its effect. He was a man of quick decision and strong resolution — qualities not always combined; and he overcame himself in a moment. He saw that he was loved — still deeply, truly loved; and that was a great point. He saw that Edith was grieved to the soul — he saw that he himself could not feel more intensely the anguish she inflicted than she did, that she was wringing her own heart while she was wringing his, and felt a double pang; and that was a strong motive for calmness, if not for fortitude. Her last words, "I wish I were dead!" restored him fully to himself; and following her to the sofa, he seated himself beside her, gently took her hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Edith," he said — "my own dear Edith, let us be calm! Thank you, my beloved, for one moment of happiness, the first I have known for years; and now let us talk, as quietly as may be, of anything that may have arisen which should justly cause Henry Layton's return to make Edith Croyland wish herself dead. Your uncle will not be long ere he arrives; I left him on the road; and it is by his full consent that I am here."

"Oh no, Harry — no!" said Edith, turning at first to his comment on her words, "it is not your return that makes me wish myself dead; but it is, that circumstances — dark and terrible circumstances — which were only made known to me an hour be-

fore your arrival, have turned all the joy, the pure, the almost unmixed joy, that I should have felt at seeing you again, into a well of bitterness. It is that I cannot, that I dare not explain to you those circumstances — that you will think me wrong, unkind — fickle, perhaps, — perhaps even mad, in whatsoever way I may act.”

“But surely you can say something, dear Edith,” said her lover; “you can give some hint of the cause of all I see. You tell me in one breath that you love me still, yet wish you were dead; and show evidently that my coming has been painful to you.”

“No, no, Harry,” she answered, mournfully, “do not say so. Painful to me? — oh, no! It would be the purest joy that ever I yet knew, were it not that — But why did you not come earlier, Harry? Why, when your horse stood upon that hill, did you not turn his head hither? Would that you had, would that you had! My fate would have been already decided. Now it is all clouds and darkness. I knew you instantly. I could see no feature; I could but trace a figure on horseback, wrapped in a large cloak; but the instinct of love told me who it was. Oh! why did you not come then?”

“Because it would have been dishonest, Edith,” answered Layton, gravely. “Your uncle had been my father’s friend, my uncle’s friend. In a kindly manner he invited me here some time ago, as a perfect stranger, under the name of Captain Osborn. You were not here then; and I thought I could not in honour come under his roof, when I found you were here, without telling him who I really was. He appointed this day to meet me at Woodchurch at two; and I dared not venture, after all that has passed between your family and mine, to seek you in his dwelling, ere I had seen and explained myself to him. I knew you were here: I gazed up at these windows with a yearning of the heart that nearly overcame my resolution —”

“I saw you gaze, Harry,” answered Edith; “and I say still, would that you had come. — Yet you were right. — It might have saved me much misery; but you were right. And now listen to the fate that is before me — to the choice I have to make, as far as I can explain it — and yet what words can I use? — But it must

be done. I must not leave anything unperformed, that can prevent poor Edith Croyland from becoming an object of hatred and contempt in Henry Layton's eyes. Little as I can do to defend myself, I must do it."

She paused, gazed up on high for a moment, and then laid her hand upon his.

"Henry, I do love you," she said. "Nay, more, I am yours, plighted to you by bonds I cannot and I dare not break — vows, I mean, the most solemn, as well as the ties of long affection. Yet, if I wed you, I am miserable for life. Self-reproach, eternal self-reproach — the most terrible of all things — to which no other mental or corporeal pain can ever reach, would prey upon my heart for ever, and bear me down into the grave. Peace — rest, I should have none. A voice would be for ever howling in my ear a name that would poison sleep, and make each waking moment an hour of agony. I can tell you no more on this side of the question; but so it is. It seems fated that I should bring misery one way or another upon him who is dearest to me."

"I cannot comprehend," exclaimed Layton, in surprise. "Your father has heard, I suppose, that I am here, and has menaced you with his curse."

"Oh, no!" answered Edith; "far from it. He was here but now; he spoke of you, Henry, as you deserve. He told me how he had loved you and esteemed you in your young days; how, though angry at first at our rash engagement, he would have consented in the end; but — there was a fatal 'but,' Henry — an impediment not to be surmounted. I must not tell you what it is — I cannot, I dare not explain. But listen to what he said besides. You have heard one part of the choice; hear the other: it is to wed a man whom I abhor — despise — condemn — whose very look is fearful to me; to ask you to give me back the vows I plighted, in order — in order," and she spoke very low, "that I may sacrifice myself for my father, that I may linger out a few weeks of wretchedness, and then sink into the grave, which is now my only hope."

"And do you ask me, Edith?" inquired Layton, in a sad and solemn tone — "do you, Edith Croyland, really and truly ask me

to give you back those vows? Speak, beloved — speak; for my heart is well nigh bursting.”

He paused, and she was silent; covering her eyes with her hands, while her bosom heaved, as if she were struggling for breath. “No, no, no, Harry!” she cried, at length, as if the effort were vain, “I cannot, I cannot! Oh, Harry, Harry! I wish that I were dead!” and, casting her arms round his neck, she wept upon his breast again.

Henry Layton drew her closer to him with his left arm round her waist; but pressed his right hand on his brow, and gazed on vacancy. Both remained without speaking for a time; but at length he said, in a voice more calm than might have been expected, “Let us consider this matter, Edith. You have been terrified by some means; a tale has been told you, which has agitated and alarmed you, which has overcome your resolution, that now has endured more than six years, and doubtless that tale has been well devised. — Are you sure that it is true? — Forgive this doubt in regard to one who is near and dear to you; but when such deceits have been practised, as those which we know have been used to delude us, I must be suspicious. — Are you sure that it is true, I say?”

“Too true, too true!” answered Edith, shaking her head, mournfully — “that tale explains all, too, — even those deceits you mention. No, no, it is but too true — it could not be feigned — besides, I remember so many things, all tending to the same. It is true — I cannot doubt it.”

Sir Henry Layton paused, and twice began to speak, but twice stopped, as if the words he was about to utter, cost him a terrible struggle to speak. At length he said, “And the man, Edith — the man they wish you to marry — who is he?”

“Ever the same,” answered Edith, bending down her head, and her cheek, which had been as pale as death, glowing like crimson — “the same, Richard Radford.”

“What! a felon!” exclaimed Layton, turning round, with his brows bent; “a felon, after whom my soldiers and the officers of justice are now hunting through the country! Sir Robert Croyland must be mad! But I tell you, Edith, that man shall never

stand within a church again, till it be the chapel of the gaol. Let him make his peace with Heaven; for if he be caught — and caught he shall be — there is no mercy for him on earth. But surely there must be some mistake. You cannot have understood your father rightly, or he cannot know —”

“Oh! yes, yes!” replied Edith; “he knows all; and it is the same. Ay, and within four days, too — that he may take me with him in his flight.”

“Ere four days be over,” answered her lover, sternly, “he shall no more think of bridals.”

“And what will become of my father, then!” said Edith, gazing steadily down upon the ground. “It is I — I that shall have done it. Alas, alas! which way shall I turn?”

There was something more than sorrow in her countenance; there was anguish — almost agony; and Sir Henry Layton was much moved. “Turn to me, Edith,” he said; “turn to him who loves you better than life; and there is no sacrifice that he will not make for you, but his honour. Tell me, have you made any promise? — have you given your father your consent?”

“No,” answered Edith, eagerly; “no, I have not. He took my words as consent, though ere they were half finished, the horror and pain of all I heard overcame me, and I fainted. But I did not consent, Harry — I could not consent, without your permission. — Oh, Harry, aid and support me!”

“Listen to me, my beloved,” replied Layton; “wealth, got by any means, is this man’s object. I gather from what you say, that your father has some cause to dread him — give up to him this much-coveted fortune — let him take it — ay, and share Henry Layton’s little wealth. I desire nothing but yourself.”

“Alas, Henry, it is all in vain!” answered Edith; “I have offered it — I knew your noble, generous heart. I knew that wealth would make no difference to him I loved, and offered to resign everything. My father, even before he came hither, offered him my sister — offered to make her the sacrifice, as she is bound by no promises, and to give her an equal portion; but it was all refused.”

“Then there is some other object,” said her lover; “some

object that may, perhaps, tend even to more misery than you dream of, Edith. Believe me, my beloved — oh! believe me, did I but see how I could deliver you — were I sure that any act of mine would give you peace, no sacrifice on my part would seem too great. At present, however, I see nothing clearly — all is darkness and shadow around. I know not, that if I give you back your promise, and free you from your vow, that I shall not be contributing to make you wretched. How, then, am I to act? You are sure, dear one, that you have not consented?"

"Quite sure," answered Edith; "and it so happened, that there was one who heard my words as well as my father. He, indeed, took them as consent, and hurried away to Mr. Radford, without giving me time to recover and say more. Read that, Harry," and she put the note her father had left into his hands.

"It is fortunate you were heard by another," replied Layton. "Hark! there is your uncle's carriage coming. — Four days, did he say — four days? Well, then, dear Edith, will you trust in me? Will you leave your fate in the hands of one who will do anything on earth for your happiness? — and will you never doubt, though you may be kept in suspense, that I will so act as to deliver you, if I can, without bringing ruin on your father."

"It is worse than ruin," answered Edith, with the tears rolling down her cheeks — "it is death. But I will trust to you, Henry — I will trust implicitly. But tell me how to act — tell me what I am to do."

"Leave this matter as it is," answered her lover, hearing Mr. Croyland's carriage stop at the door; — "your father has snatched too eagerly at your words. Perhaps he has done so to gain time; but, at all events, the fault is his, not yours. If he speaks to you on the subject, you must tell the truth, and say you did not consent; but in everything else be passive — let him do with you what he will — take you to the altar, if he so pleases; but there must be the final struggle, Edith. There you must boldly and aloud refuse to wed a man you cannot love. There let the memory of your vows to me be ever present with you. It may seem cruel, but I exact it for your own sake. In the meantime, take means to let me know everything that happens, be it small or great — cast

off all reserve towards Digby; tell him all, everything that takes place; tell your sister, too, or any one who can bear me the tidings. I shall be nearer than you think."

"Oh, Heaven, how will this end!" cried Edith, putting her hand in his — "God help me, Harry — God help me!"

"He will, dear girl," answered Layton — "I feel sure he will. But remember what I have said. Fail not to tell Digby, or Zara, or any one who can bear the tidings to me, everything that occurs, every word that is spoken, every step that is taken. Think nothing too trifling. But there is your uncle's voice in the passage. Can you not inform him of that which you think yourself bound not to tell me? I mean the particulars of your father's situation."

"No; oh no!" replied Edith — "I dare tell no one, especially not my uncle. Though kind, and generous, and benevolent, yet he is hasty, and he might ruin all. Dared I tell any one on earth, Henry, it would be you; and if I loved you before — oh, how I must love you now, when instead of the anger, or even heat, which I expected you to display, you have shown yourself ready to sacrifice all for one who is hardly worthy of you."

Layton pressed her to his bosom, and replied, "Real love is unselfish, Edith. I tell you, dearest, that I die if I lose you; yet, Edith Croyland shall never do what is wrong for Henry Layton's sake. If in the past we did commit an error, if I should not have engaged you by vows without your parent's consent — though God knows that error has been bitterly visited on my head! — I am still ready to make atonement to the best of my power; but I will not consent that you should be causelessly made miserable, or sacrifice yourself and me, without benefit to any one. Trust to me, Edith — trust to me."

"I will, I will!" answered Edith Croyland; "who can I trust to else?"

Mr. Croyland was considerate; and knowing that Sir Henry Layton was with his niece — for his young friend had passed him on the road — he paused for a moment in the vestibule, giving various orders and directions, in order to afford them a few minutes more of private conversation. When he went in, he was surprised to find Edith's face full of deep grief, and her eyes wet with

tears, and still more when Layton, after kissing her fair cheek, advanced towards him, saying, "I must go, my dear friend, nor can I accept your kind invitation to stay here to-night. But I am about to show myself a bold man, and ask you to give me almost the privilege of a son — that is, of coming and going, for the four or five next days, at my own will, and without question."

"What 's all this? — what 's all this?" cried Mr. Croyland; "a lovers' quarrel? — Ha, Edith? Ha, Harry?"

"Oh, no," answered Edith, giving her uncle her hand, "there never can be a quarrel between me and Henry Layton."

"Well, then, what is it all?" exclaimed Mr. Croyland, turning from one to the other. "Mystery — mystery! I hate mystery, Harry Layton. — However, you shall have your privilege; the doors shall be open. Come — go — do what you like. But if you are not a great fool, you will order over a post-chaise and four this very night, put her in, and be off for Gretna Green. I'll give you my parental benediction."

"I am afraid, my dear Sir," answered Layton, "that cannot be. Edith has told me various things since I saw her, which require to be dealt with in a different way. I trust, that in whatever I do, my conduct will be such as to give you satisfaction; and whether the result be fortunate or otherwise, I shall never, till the last hour of life, forget the kindness you have shown me. And now, my dear Sir, adieu for the present, for I have much to do this night."

Thus saying, he shook the old gentleman's hand, and departed with a heavy heart and anxious mind. During his onward ride, his heart did not become lighter; his mind was only more burdened with cares. As long as he was in Edith's presence, he had borne up and struggled against all that he felt; for he saw that she was already overwhelmed with grief, and he feared to add to it; but now his thoughts were all confusion. With incomplete information — in circumstances the most difficult — anxious to save her he loved, even at any sacrifice on his own part, yet seeing no distinct means of acting in any direction without danger to her — he looked around him in vain for any resource; or, if he formed a plan one moment, he rejected it the next. He knew Edith's per-

fect truth, he knew the quiet firmness and power of her mind too well to doubt one tittle of that which she had stated; and though at first sight he thought the proofs he possessed of Mr. Radford's participation in the late smuggling transaction were quite sufficient to justify that person's immediate arrest, and proposed that it should take place immediately, yet the next moment he recollected what might be the result to Sir Robert Croyland, and hesitated how to act. Then, again, he turned his eyes to the circumstances in which Edith's father was placed, and asked himself, what could be the mystery which so terribly overshadowed him? Edith had said that his life was at stake; and Layton tortured his imagination in vain to find some explanation of such a fact.

"Can he have been deceiving her?" he asked himself more than once. But then, again, he answered, "No, it must be true! He can have no ordinary motive in urging her to such a step; his whole character, his whole views are against it. Haughty and ostentatious, there must be some overpowering cause to make him seek to wed his daughter to a low ruffian — the son of an upstart, who owed his former wealth to fraud, and who is now, if all tales be true, nearly bankrupt, — to wed Edith, a being of grace, of beauty, and of excellence, to a villain like this — a felon and a fugitive—and to send her forth into the wide world, to share the wanderings of a man she hates! The love of life must be a strange thing in some men. One would have thought that a thousand lives were nothing to such a sacrifice. Yet, the tale must be true; this old man must have Sir Robert's life in his power. But how — how? that is the question. Perhaps Digby can discover something. At all events, I must see him without delay."

In such thoughts, Sir Henry Layton rode on fast to Woodchurch, accomplishing in twenty minutes that which took good Mr. Croyland, with his pampered horses, more than an hour to perform; and springing from his charger at the door of the inn, he was preparing to go up and write to Sir Edward Digby, when Captain Irby, on the one hand, and his own servant on the other, applied for attention.

"Mr. Warde is up stairs, Sir," said the servant; "he has been waiting about half an hour."

But Layton turned to the officer, asking, "What is it, Captain Irby?"

"Two or three of the men, Sir, who have been taken," replied Captain Irby, "have expressed a wish to make a statement. One of them is badly wounded, too; but I did not know how to act till you arrived, as we had no magistrate here."

"Was it quite voluntary?" demanded the young officer; "no inducements held out — no questions asked?"

"Quite voluntary, Sir," answered the other, "They sent to ask for you; and when I went, in your absence, they told me what it was they desired; but I refused to take the deposition till you arrived, for fear of getting myself into a scrape."

"It must be taken," replied the Colonel. "Of whatever value it may be judged hereafter, we must not refuse it when offered. I will come to them in a moment, Irby;" and entering the house, but without going up stairs, he wrote a few lines, in the bar, to Sir Edward Digby, requesting to see him without delay. Then, calling his servant, he said, "Tell Mr. Warde I will be with him in a few minutes; after which, mount yourself, and carry this note over to Harbourne House, to Sir Edward Digby. Give it into his own hand; but remember, it is my wish that you should not mention my name there at all. Do you know the place?"

"Yes, Sir," replied the man; and, leaving him to fulfil his errand, the Colonel returned to the door of the house, to accompany Captain Irby.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WE must now return for a time to Harbourne House, where, after Sir Robert Croyland's departure, his guest had endeavoured in vain, during the whole morning, to obtain a few minutes' private conversation with the baronet's youngest daughter. Now, it was not in the least degree, that Mrs. Barbara's notions of propriety interfered to prevent the two young people from being alone together; for, on the contrary, Mrs. Barbara was a very lenient and

gentle-minded person, and thought it quite right that any two human beings who were likely to fall in love with each other, should have every opportunity of doing so, to their hearts' content. But it so happened, from a sort of fatality which hung over all her plans, that whenever she interfered with anything, — which, indeed, she always did, with everything she could lay her hands upon, — the result was sure to be directly the contrary to that which she intended. It might be, indeed, that she did not always manage matters quite judiciously, that she acted without considering all the circumstances of the case; and undoubtedly it would have been quite as well if she had not acted at all when she was not asked.

In the present instance, when she had remained in the drawing-room with her niece and Sir Edward, for near half an hour after her brother had departed, it just struck her that they might wish to be alone together; for she had made up her mind by this time, that the young officer's visit was to end in a love affair; and, as the very best means of accomplishing the desired object, instead of going to speak with the housekeeper, or to give orders to the dairy-maid, or to talk to the steward, — as any other prudent, respectable, and well-arranged aunt would have done — she said to her niece, as if a sudden thought had occurred to her, "I don't think Sir Edward Digby has ever seen the library. Zara, my dear, you had better show it to him. There are some very curious books there, and the manuscript in vellum, with all the kings' heads painted."

Zara felt that it was rather a coarse piece of work which her aunt had just turned out of hand; and being a little too much susceptible of ridicule, she did not like to have anything to do with it, although, to say the truth, she was very anxious herself for the few minutes that Mrs. Barbara was inclined to give her.

"Oh, I dare say, my dear aunt," she replied, "Sir Edward Digby does not care anything about old books! — I don't believe they have been opened for these fifty years."

"The greater the treasure, Miss Croyland," answered the young officer; "I can assure you nothing delights me more than

an old library; so I think I shall go and find it out myself, if you are not disposed to show it to me."

Zara Croyland remembered, with a smile, that Sir Edward Digby had met with no great difficulty in finding it out for himself on a previous occasion. She rose, however, with her colour a little heightened; for his invitation was a very palpable one, and she did not know what conclusions her aunt might be pleased to draw, or to insinuate to others; and, leading the way towards the library, she opened the door, expecting to find the room untenanted. There, however, before her eyes, standing opposite to a book-case, with a large folio volume of divinity in his hand, stood the clergyman of the parish; and he instantly turned round his head, with spectacles on nose, and advanced to pay his respects to Miss Croyland and Sir Edward Digby. Now, the clergyman was a very worthy man; but he had one of those peculiarities, which, if peculiarities were systematically classed, would be referred to the bore genus. He was frequently unaware of when people had had enough of him; and consequently on the present occasion — after he had informed Zara, that finding that her father was out, he had taken the liberty of walking into the library to look at a book he wanted — he put back that book, and attacked Sir Edward Digby, *totis viribus*, upon the state of the weather, the state of the country, and the state of the smugglers. The later topic, as it was the predominant one in every man's mind at that moment, and in that part of the country, occupied him rather longer than a sermon, though his parishioners occasionally thought his sermons quite sufficiently extensive for any sleep-resisting powers of the human frame to withstand; and then, when Sir Edward and Zara, forgetting, in the interest which they seemed to take in his discourse, that they had come into the library to look at the books, walked out upon the terrace, he walked out with them; and as they turned up and down, he turned up and down also, for full an hour.

Zara could almost have cried in the end; but, as out of the basest refuse of our stable-yards, grow the finest flowers of our gardens, so good is ever springing up from evil; and in the end the worthy clergyman gave his two companions the first distinct

account which they had received of the dispersion of Mr. Radford's band of smugglers, and of the eager pursuit of young Radford which was taking place throughout the country. Thus passed the morning, with one event or other of little consequence, presenting obstacles to any free communication between two people, who were almost as desirous of some private conversation as if they had been lovers.

A little before three o'clock, however, Zara Croyland who had been looking out of the window, suddenly quitted the drawing-room; and Sir Edward Digby, who maintained his post, was left to entertain Mrs. Barbara, which he did to the best of his abilities. He was still in full career, a little enjoying, to say sooth, some of the good lady's minor absurdities, when Zara re-entered the room with a quick step, and a somewhat eager look. Her fair cheek was flushed too; and her face had in it that sort of determined expression which often betrays that there has been a struggle in the mind, as to some step about to be taken, and that victory has not been achieved without an effort.

"Sir Edward Digby," she said, in a clear and distinct tone, "I want to speak with you for a few moments, if you please."

Mrs. Barbara looked shocked, and internally wondered that Zara could not have made some little excuse for engaging Sir Edward in private conversation.

"She might have asked him to go and see a flower, or offered to play him a tune on the harpsichord, or taken him to look at the dove-cot, or anything," thought Mrs. Barbara.

The young officer, however, instantly started up, and accompanied his fair inviter towards the library, to which she led the way with a hurried and eager step.

"Let us come in here!" she said, opening the door; but the moment she was within, she sank into a chair and clasped her hands together.

Sir Edward Digby shut the door, and then advanced towards her, a good deal surprised and somewhat alarmed by the agitation he saw her display. She did not speak for a moment, as if completely overpowered, and feeling for her more deeply than he himself knew, her companion took her hand and tried to soothe her,

saying, "Be calm — be calm, my dear Miss Croyland! You know you can trust in me, and if I can aid you in any way, command me."

"I know not what to do, or what to say," cried Zara; "but I am sure, Sir Edward, you will find excuses for me; and therefore I will make none — though I may perhaps seem somewhat bold in dealing thus with one whom I have only known a few days."

"There are circumstances which sometimes make a few days equal to many years," replied Sir Edward Digby. "It is so, my dear young lady, with you and I. Therefore, without fear or hesitation, tell me what it is that agitates you, and how I can serve you. I am not fond of making professions; but if it be in human power, it shall be done."

"I know not, whether it can be done or not," said Zara; "but if not, there is nothing but ruin and desolation for two people, whom we both love. You saw my father set out this morning. Did you remark the course he took? It was over to my uncle's, for I watched him from the window. He passed back again some time ago, but then struck off towards Mr. Radford's. All that made me uneasy; but just now, I saw Edith's maid coming up towards the house; and eager for tidings, I hurried away. — Good Heavens, what tidings she has borne me!"

"They must be evil ones, I see," answered Digby; "but I trust not such as to preclude all chance of remedying what may have gone wrong. When two or three people act together zealously, dear lady, there are very few things they cannot accomplish."

"Yes, but how to explain!" exclaimed Zara; "yet I must be short; for otherwise my aunt will be in upon us. Now, Sir Edward Digby," she continued, after thinking for a moment, "I know you are a man of honour — I am sure you are; and I ask you to pledge me that honour, that you will never reveal to any one what I am going to tell you; for I know not whether I am about to do right or wrong — whether, in trying to save one, I may not be bringing down ruin upon others. Do you give me your honour?"

"Most assuredly!" answered her companion. "I will never

repeat a word that you say, unless with your permission, on my honour!"

"Well, then," replied Zara, in a faint voice, "Mr. Radford has my father's life in his power. How, I know not — how, I cannot tell. But so it is; and such are the tidings that Caroline has just brought us. Mr. Radford's conference with him this morning was not for nothing. Immediately after, he went over to Edith; he told her some tale which the girl did not distinctly hear; but, it seems, some paper which Mr. Radford possesses was spoken of, and the sum of the whole matter was, that my poor, sweet sister was told, if she did not consent, within four days, to marry that hateful young man, she would sacrifice her father's life. He left her fainting, and has ridden over to bear her consent to Mr. Radford."

"But, did she consent?" exclaimed Sir Edward Digby, in surprise and consternation — "Did she really yield?"

"No — no!" answered Zara, "she did not! The girl said she heard her words, and they were not in truth a consent. But my father chose to take them as such, and left her even before she recovered."

I have already shown the effect of the same account upon Sir Henry Layton, with all the questions which it suggested to his mind; and the impression produced upon his friend, as a man of sense and a man of the world, were so similar, that it may be needless to give any detailed statement of his first observations or inquiries. Zara soon satisfied him, however, that the tale her father had told, was not a mere device to frighten Edith into a compliance with his wishes; and then came the question, What was to be done?

"It is, in truth, a most painful situation in which your sister is placed," said Digby, after some consideration; "but think you that this man, this Radford, cannot be bought off? Money must be to him — if he be as totally ruined as people say — the first consideration; and I know Layton so well, that I can venture to promise nothing of that kind shall stand in the way, if we can but free your sister from the terrible choice put before her."

Zara shook her head sadly, saying, "No; that hope is vain! —

The girl tells me," she added, with a faint smile, which was quickly succeeded by a blush, "that she heard my father say, he had offered me — poor me! to Richard Radford, with the same fortune as Edith, but had been refused."

"And would you have consented?" demanded Sir Edward Digby, in a more eager tone than he had yet used.

"Nay," replied Zara, "that has nought to do with the present question. Suffice it, that this proves that gold is not his only object."

"Nay, but answer me," persevered her companion; "would you have consented? It may have much to do with the question yet." He fixed his eyes gravely upon her face, and took the fair, small hand, that lay upon the arm of the chair, in his. — It was something very like making love, and Zara felt a strange sensation at her heart; but she turned away her face, and answered, with a very pale cheek, "I would die for my father, Sir Edward; but I could not wed Richard Radford."

Sir Edward raised her hand to his lips, and pressed them on it. "I thought so!" he said — "I thought so! And now, heart, and mind, and hand, and spirit, to save your sister, Zara! I have hunted many a fox in my day, and I don't think the old one of Radford Hall will escape me. The greatest difficulty is, not to compromise your father in any way; but that shall be cared for, too, to the very best of my power, be assured. Henceforth, dear lady, away with all reserve between us. While I am in this house, it will be absolutely necessary for you to communicate with me freely, and probably very often. Have no hesitation; have no scruple as to hour, or manner, or means. Trust to my honour as you have trusted this day; and you shall never find it fail you. I will enter into such explanations with my servant, Somers, in regard to poor Layton, as will make him think it nothing strange, if you send him for me at any time. He is as discreet as a privy councillor; and you must, therefore, have no hesitation."

"I will not," answered Zara; "for I would do anything to save my sister from such a fate; and I do believe you will not think — you will not imagine —"

— She paused in some confusion; and Sir Edward Digby an-

swered, with a smile — but a kindly and a gentlemanly one, “Let my imagination do as it will, Zara. Depend upon it, it shall do you no wrong; and believe me when I say, that I can hardly feel so much pain at these circumstances as I otherwise might, since they bring me into such near and frequent communication with you.”

“Hush, hush!” she answered, somewhat gravely; “I can think of nothing now but my poor sister; and you must not, Sir Edward, by one compliment, or fine speech — nay, nor by one kind speech either,” she added, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking up in his face, with a glowing cheek — “for I know you mean it as kind — you must not, indeed, throw any embarrassment over an intercourse, which is necessary at present, and which is my only hope and resource, in the circumstances in which we are placed. So now tell me what you are going to do; for you seemed, but now, as if you were about to set out somewhere.”

“I am going to Woodchurch instantly,” replied Digby. “Sir Henry Layton must be there still —”

“Sir Henry Layton!” exclaimed Zara; “then he has, indeed, been a successful campaigner.”

“Most successful, and most deservedly so,” answered his friend. “No man but Wolfe won more renown; and if he can but gain this battle, Layton will have all that he desires on earth. But I will not stay here, skirmishing on the flanks, dear lady, while the main body is engaged. I will ride over as fast as possible, see Layton, consult with him, and be back, if possible, by dinner time. If not, you must tell your father not to wait for me, as I was suddenly called away on business.”

“But how shall I know the result of your expedition?” demanded Zara; “we shall be surrounded, I fear, by watchful eyes.”

“We must trust to fortune and our own efforts to afford us some means of communication,” replied Digby. “But remember, dearest lady, that for this great object, you have promised to cast away all reserve. For the time, at least, you must look upon Edward Digby as a brother, and treat him as such.”

"That I will!" answered the fair girl, heartily; and Digby, leaving her to explain their conduct to her aunt as she best might, ordered his horse, and rode away towards Woodchurch, in haste.

Pulling in his rein at the door of the little inn, he inquired which was Sir Henry Layton's room, and was directed up stairs; but on opening the door of the chamber which had been pointed out, he found no one in it, but the somewhat strange-looking old man, whom we have once before seen with Layton, at Hythe.

"Ah, Mr. Warde, you here!" exclaimed Sir Edward Digby. "Layton told me you were in England. But where is he? I have business of some importance to talk with him upon;" and as he spoke, he shook the old man's hand warmly.

"I know you have," answered Mr. Warde, gazing upon him — "at least, I can guess that such is the case. — So have I; and doubtless the subject is the same."

"Nay, I should think not," replied Digby; "mine refers only to private affairs."

The old man smiled; and that sharp-featured, rude countenance assumed an expression of indescribable sweetness: "Mine is the same," he said. "You come to speak of Edith Croyland — so do I."

"Indeed!" cried his companion, a good deal surprised; "you are a strange being, Mr. Warde. You seem to learn men's secrets, whether they will or not."

"There is nothing strange on earth, but man's blindness," answered the other; "everything is so simple, when once explained, that its simplicity remains the only marvel. — But here he comes. Let me converse with him first. Then, when he is aware of all that I know, you shall have my absence, or my presence, as it suits you."

While he was speaking, the voice of Henry Layton was heard below, and then his step upon the stairs; and, before Digby could answer, he was in the room. His face was grave, but not so cloudy as it had been when he returned to Woodchurch, half-an-hour before. He welcomed Mr. Warde frankly, and cordially; but turned immediately to Sir Edward Digby, saying, "You have

been quick indeed, Digby. I could not have conceived that my letter had reached you."

"I got no letter," answered Digby; "perhaps it missed me on the way; for, the corn being down, I came straight across the country."

"It matters not — it matters not," answered Layton; "so you are here — that is enough. I have much to say to you, and that of immediate importance."

"I know it already," answered Digby. "But here is our good friend, Warde, who seems to have something to say to you on the same subject."

Sir Henry Layton turned towards the old man with some surprise. "I think Digby must be mistaken," he said, "for though, I am aware, from what you told me some little time ago, that you have been in this part of the country before, yet it must have been long ago, and you can know nothing of the events which have affected myself since."

The old man smiled, and shook his head. "I know more than you imagine," he answered. "It is, indeed, long since first I was in this land; but not so long since I was here last; and all its people and its things, its woods, its villages, its hills, are as familiar to me — ay, more so than to you. Of yourself, Layton, and your fate, I also know much — I might say I know all; for certainly I know more than you do, can do more than you are able to do, will do more than you can. To show you what I know; I will give you a brief summary of your own history — at least, that part of it, of which you think I know nothing. Young, eager, and impatient, you were thrown constantly into the society of one, good, beautiful, gentle, and true. You had much encouragement from those who should not have given it, unless they had the intention of continuing it to the end. You loved, and were beloved; and then, in the impatience of your boyish ardour, you bound Edith Croyland to yourself, without her parent's knowledge and consent, by vows which, whatever human laws may say, are indissoluble by the law of Heaven; and therein you did wrong. It was a great error. — Do I say right?"

"It was, indeed," answered Sir Henry Layton, casting down his eyes sternly on the ground — "it was, indeed."

"More — I will tell you more," continued Mr. Warde; "you have bitterly repented it, and bitterly suffered for it. You are suffering even now."

"Not for it," replied the young officer — "not for it. My sufferings are not consequences of my fault."

"You are wrong," answered the old man; "wrong, as you will find. But I will go on, and tell you what you have done this day. Those who have behaved ill to you have been punished likewise; and their punishment is working itself out, but sweeping you in within its vortex. You have been over to see Edith Croyland. She has told you her tale. You have met in love, and parted in sorrow. — Is it not so? And now you know not which way to turn for deliverance."

"It is so, indeed, my good friend," said Layton, sadly; "but how you have discovered all this, I cannot divine."

"That has nought to do with the subject," answered Warde. "Now tell me, Layton, tell me — and remember you are dearer to me than you know — are you prepared to make atonement for your fault? The only atonement in your power — to give back to Edith the vows she plighted, to leave her free to act as she may judge best. I have marked you well, as you know, for years. I have seen you tried as few men, perhaps, are tried; and you have come out pure and honest. The last trial is now arrived; and I ask you here, before your friend, your wordly friend, if you are ready to act honestly still, and to annul engagements that you had no right to contract?"

"I am," answered Sir Henry Layton; "I am, if —"

"Ay, if! There is ever an 'if' when men would serve their own purposes against their conscience," said Mr. Warde, sternly.

"Nay, but hear me, my good friend," replied the young officer. "I have every respect for you. Your whole character commands it and deserves it, as well as your profession; but, at the same time, though I may think fit to answer you candidly, in matters where I would reject any other man's interference, yet I must shape my answer as I think proper, and rule my conduct

according to my own views. You must, therefore, hear me out. I say that I am ready to give back to Edith Croyland the vows she plighted me, to set her free from all engagements, to leave her, as far as possible, as if she had never known Henry Layton, whatever pang it may cost me — *if* it can be proved to me that by so doing I have not given her up to misery, as well as myself. My own wretchedness I can bear — I have borne it long, cheered by one little ray of hope. I can bear it still, even though that light go out; but to know that by any act of mine — however seemingly generous, or, as you term it, honest — I had yielded her up to a life of anguish, that I could not bear. Show me that this will not be the case; and, as I have said before, I am ready to make the sacrifice, if it cost me life. Nay, more: I returned hither prepared, if at the last, and with every effort to avert it, I found that circumstances of which I know not the extent, rendered the keeping of her vows to me more terrible in its consequences than her union with another, however hateful he may be, — I came hither prepared, I say, in such a case, to set her free; and I will do it!”

The old man took both his hands, and gazed on him with a look of glad satisfaction. “Honest to the last,” he said — “honest to the last! The resolution to do this, is as good as the deed; for I know you are not one to fail where you have resolved. — But those who might exact the sacrifice are not worthy of it. Your willingness has made the atonement, Layton; and I will deliver you from your difficulty.”

“You, Mr. Warde!” exclaimed Sir Edward Digby; “I cannot suppose that you really have the power; or, perhaps, after all, you do not know the whole circumstances.”

“Hush, hush, young man!” answered Warde, with a wave of the hand; “I know all, I see all, where you know little or nothing. You are a good youth, as the world goes — better than most of your bad class and station; but these matters are above you. Listen to me, Layton. Did not Edith tell you that her father had worked upon her, by fears for his safety — for his honour — for his life, perhaps?”

“Yes, indeed,” exclaimed Layton, eagerly, and with a ray

of hope beginning to break upon him. "Was the tale not true, then?"

"I guessed so," answered the old man. "I was sure that would be the course at last. Nevertheless, the tale he told was true — too true. It was forced from him by circumstances. Yet, I have said I will deliver you from your difficulty; and I will. Pursue your own course; as you have commenced, go on to the end. I ask you not now to give Edith back her promises. Nay, I tell you, that her misery, her wretchedness — ay, tenfold more than any you could suffer — would be the consequence, if you did so. Let her go on firmly in her truth to the last; but tell her, that deliverance will come. Now I leave you; but, be under no doubt. Your course is clear; do all you can by your own efforts to save her; but it is I who must deliver her in the end."

Without any further farewell, he turned and left the room; and Sir Henry Layton and his friend remained for a minute or two in thought.

"His parting advice is the best," said Digby, at length; "and doubtless you will follow it, Layton; but, of course, you will not trust so far to the word of a madman, as to neglect any means that may present themselves."

"He is not mad," answered Layton, shaking his head. "When first he joined us in Canada, before the battle of Quebec, I thought as you do; but he is not mad, Digby. There are various shades of reason; and there may be a slight aberration in his mind from the common course of ordinary thought. He may be wrong in his reasonings, rash in his opinions, somewhat overexcited in imagination; but that is not madness. His promises give me hope, I will confess; but still I will act as if they had not been made. Now let us speak of our plans; and first tell me what has taken place at Harbourn; for you seem to know all the particulars already, which I sent for you to communicate, though how you learned them I cannot divine."

"Oh, my dear Layton, if I were to tell you all that has happened," replied Sir Edward Digby, "I should have to go on as long as a Presbyterian minister, or a popular orator. I had better keep to the point;" and he proceeded to relate to his friend the

substance of the conversation which had last taken place between himself and Zara.

"It is most fortunate," answered Layton, "that dear girl has thus become acquainted with the facts; for Edith would not have told her, and now we have some chance of obtaining information of all that occurs, which must be our great security. However — since I returned, I have obtained valuable information, which puts good Mr. Radford's liberty, if not his life, in my power. Three of the men whom we have taken, distinctly state that he sent them upon this expedition himself — armed, and mounted them; and therefore he is a party to the whole transaction. I have sent off a messenger to Mowle, the officer — as faithful and as true a fellow as ever lived — begging him to bring me up, without a moment's delay, a magistrate in whom he can trust; for one of the men is at the point of death, and all the justices round this place are so imbued with the spirit of smuggling, that I do not choose the depositions to be taken by them. I have received and written down the statements made, before witnesses; and the men have signed them; but I have no power in this case to administer an oath. As soon as the matter is in more formal train, I shall insist upon the apprehension of Mr. Radford, whatever be the consequences to Sir Robert Croyland; for here my duty to the country is concerned, and the very powers with which I am entrusted, render it imperative upon me so to act."

"If you can catch him — if you can catch him!" replied Sir Edward Digby. "But be sure, my dear Layton, if he once discovers that you have got such a hold upon him, he will take care to render that matter difficult. You may find it troublesome, also, to get a magistrate to act as you desire; for they are all of the same leaven; and I fancy you have no power to do anything yourself except in aid and support of the civil authorities. You must be very careful, too, not to exceed your commission, where people might suspect that personal feelings are concerned."

"Personal feelings shall not bias me, Digby, even in the slightest degree," replied his friend. "I will act towards Mr. Radford, exactly as I would towards any other man who had committed this offence; and, as to the imputation of motives, I can

well afford to treat such things with contempt. Were I, indeed, to act as I wish, I should not pursue this charge against the chief offender, in order not to bring down his vengeance suddenly upon Sir Robert Croyland's head, or should use the knowledge I possess merely to impose silence upon him through fear. But my duty is plain and straightforward; and it must be done. As to my powers, they are more extensive than you suppose. Indeed, I would have sooner thrown up my commission, than have undertaken a service I disliked, without sufficient authority to execute it properly. Thus, if no magistrate could be found to act as I might require, I would not scruple, with the aid of any officer of Customs, or even without, to apprehend this man on my own responsibility. But I think we shall easily find one who will do his duty."

"At all events," replied Sir Edward Digby, "you had better be cautious, my dear Layton. If you are not too quick in your movements, you may perhaps trap the old bird and the young one together; and that will be a better day's sport than if you only got a single shot."

"Heaven send it may be before these fatal four days are over!" answered Layton; "for then the matter will be decided and Edith delivered."

"Why, if you were to catch the young one, it would be sufficient for that object," said his friend.

But Layton shook his head. "I fear not," he replied; "yet that purpose must not be neglected. Where he has concealed himself I cannot divine. It would seem certain that he never got out of Harbourne Wood, unless, indeed, it was by some of the bye-paths; and in that case, he surely must have been seen. I will have it searched, to-morrow, from end to end."

In the same strain the conversation proceeded for half-an-hour more, without any feasible plan of action having been decided upon, and with no further result than the arrangement of means for frequent and private communication. It was settled, indeed, that Layton should fix his head-quarters at Woodchurch, and that two or three of the dragoons should be billeted at a small public-house on the road to Harbourne. To them any communication

from Sir Edward Digby was to be conveyed by his servant, Somers, for the purpose of being forwarded to Woodchurch. Such matters being thus arranged, as far as circumstances admitted, the two friends parted; and Digby rode back to Harbourne House, which he reached, as may be supposed, somewhat later than Sir Robert Croyland's dinner-hour.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ABOUT six o'clock on the evening of the same day, the cottage of Mrs. Clare was empty. The good widow herself stood at the garden gate, and looked up the road into the wood, along which the western sun was streaming low. After gazing for a moment in that direction, she turned her eyes to the left, and then down the edge of the wood, which stretched along in a tolerably even line till it reached the farther angle. The persevering dragoons were patrolling round it still; and Mrs. Clare murmured to herself, "How will he ever get out, if they keep such a watch?"

She was then going into the cottage again, when a hurried step caught her ear, coming apparently from the path which led from the side of Halden to the back of the house, and thence round the little garden into the road.

"That sounds like Harding's step," thought the widow; and her ear had not deceived her. In another minute, she beheld him turn the corner of the fence and come towards her; but there was a heated and angry look upon his face, which she had never seen there before; and — although she had acted for the best, and not without much consideration, in sending Kate upon Mr. Radford's commission, and not going herself — she feared that her daughter's lover might not be well pleased his bride should undertake such a task. As he came near, the symptoms of anger were more apparent still. There was the cloudy brow, the flashing eye, the hurried and impetuous walk, which she had often seen in her own husband — a man very similar in character to him who now approached her — when irritated by harsh words; and Widow Clare prepared to do all she could to soothe him ere Kate's return.

But Harding did not mention her he loved, demanding, while yet at some distance, "Where is Mr. Radford, Mrs. Clare?"

"He is not here, Mr. Harding," replied the widow; "he has not been here since the morning. But what makes you look so cross, Harding? You seem angry."

"And well I may be," answered Harding, with an oath. "What do you think they have set about? — That I informed against them, and betrayed them into the hands of the dragoons: when, they know, I saw them safe out of the Marsh; and it must have been their own stupidity, or the old man's babbling fears, that ruined them — always trusting people that were sure to be treacherous, and doubting those he knew to be honest. But I'll make him eat his words, or cram them down his throat with my fist."

"Why, he spoke quite kindly of you this morning, Harding," said the widow; "there must be some mistake."

"Mistake!" cried the smuggler, sharply; "there is no mistake. — It is all over Hythe and Folkestone already; and every one says that it came from him. Can you not tell me where he is gone? — Which way did he turn?"

"Towards his own house," replied Mrs. Clare; "but you had better come in, Harding, and get yourself cool before you go to him. You will speak angrily now, and mischief may come of it. I am sure there is some mistake."

"I will not sit down till I have made him own it," answered the smuggler. "Perhaps he is up at Harbourne. I'll go there. Where is Kate, Mrs. Clare?"

"She has gone towards Harbourne House," said the widow, not choosing, in the excited state of his feelings, to tell him her daughter's errand; "but she will be back in one minute, if you will but come in."

"No," he replied; "I will come back by-and-by. Perhaps I shall meet her as I go;" and he was turning towards the wood, when suddenly, at the spot where the road entered amongst the trees, the pretty figure of Kate Clare, as trim, and neat, and simple as a wild flower, appeared walking slowly back towards the cottage. But she was not alone. By her side was a tall, hand-

some young man, dressed in full military costume, with his heavy sword under his arm, and a star upon his breast. He was bending down, talking to his fair companion with a friendly air, and she was answering him with a gay smile.

A pang shot through Harding's bosom: the first that ever the poor girl had caused; nor, indeed, would he have felt it then, had he not been irritated; for his was a frank and confiding heart, open as the day, in which that foul and dangerous guest, Suspicion, usually could find no lurking place. At first he did not recognise, in the glittering personage before his eyes, the grave, plain-looking stranger, who, a week or two before, had conversed with him for a few minutes on the cliffs near Sandgate; but he saw, as the two came on, that Kate raised her eyes; and as soon as she perceived him standing by her mother, a look of joy lighted up her face, which made him murmur to himself, "I'm a fool!"

The stranger, too, saw him; but it made no change in his demeanour; and the next moment, to Harding's surprise, the officer came forward somewhat more quickly, and took Widow Clare by the hand, saying, with a grave smile, "Do you not know me, Mrs. Clare?"

"Gracious Heaven!" cried the widow, drawing back and gazing at him, "Can it be you, Sir?"

"Yes, indeed!" he answered. "Why, Kate here knew me directly, though she was but ten or eleven, I think, when I went away."

"Oh, that was because you were always so fond of her, Mr. Henry," replied Widow Clare. "Gracious! how you are changed!"

Harding was talking to Kate while these few words passed, but he heard them; nor did he fail to remark that two mounted dragoons, one leading a horse by the rein, followed the young officer from the wood. He now recognised him also; and by his dress perceived the rank he held in the army, though Mrs. Clare called him "Mr. Henry."

"Yes, I am changed, indeed!" replied Layton, to the widow's last remark, "in body and health, Mrs. Clare, but not

in heart, I can assure you; and as I was obliged to visit this wood, I resolved I would not be so near you without coming in to see how you were going on, with your pretty Kate here."

"My pretty Kate, very soon!" said Harding, aloud; and the young officer turned suddenly round, and looked at him more attentively than before.

"Ah, Mr. Harding!" he exclaimed, "is that you? We have met before, though perhaps you don't remember me."

"Oh yes, I do, Sir," replied the smuggler, drily. "But I must go, Kate;" and he added, in a low tone, "I shall be back by-and-by."

Thus saying, he walked away; but before he had taken ten steps, Layton followed, and took him by the arm. "What do you want with me, Sir?" asked the smuggler, turning sharply round, and putting his hand in the bosom of his coat.

"Hush!" replied the young officer; "I seek no harm to you — merely one word. For Heaven's sake, Harding, quit this perilous life of yours! — at least, before you marry that poor girl — if I have understood you rightly, that you are about to marry her. I speak as a friend."

"Thank you, Sir!" answered the smuggler, "I dare say you mean it kind; but it was hardly fair of you, either, to come and talk with me upon the cliff, if you are, as I suppose, the Sir Henry Layton all the folks are speaking about."

"Why, my good friend, my talking with you did you no harm," replied the young officer; "you cannot say that I led you to speak of anything that could injure either you or others. Besides, I have nothing to do with you gentlemen of the sea, though I may with your friends on land. But take the advice of one well disposed towards you; and, above all, do not linger about this place at present, for it is a dangerous neighbourhood for any one who has had a share in the late transactions."

"That advice I shall take, at all events," answered Harding, bluntly; "and perhaps the other too, for I am sick of all this!" And thus saying, he walked away, passing close by the two dragoons, who offered no obstruction.

In the meanwhile Layton, returning to Widow Clare and her

daughter, went into the cottage, and talked to them, for a few minutes, of old days. Gradually, however, he brought the conversation round to the inhabitants of Harbourne House, and asked if either the widow or Kate ever went up there.

"Oh, Kate goes twice every day, Sir," said Mrs. Clare, "for we have all the finest of the poultry to keep down here. But are you not going there yourself, Mr. Henry?"

"Alas, no!" answered Layton, with a sigh. "Those days have gone by, Mrs. Clare; and I am now a stranger where I was once loved."

"Don't say so, Sir," replied the widow, "don't say so! For, I am sure, where you were best loved of all, there you are best loved still."

"That I believe," answered Layton; "but, at all events, I am not going there at present; and if Kate would do me a service, she would, the first time she sees Miss Zara Croyland alone, tell her, that if ever she rides or walks out along the road by the Chequers, she will find an old friend by the way."

"Miss Zara, Sir, did you say?" asked Widow Clare.

"Yes, mother — yes," cried Kate; "you forget Miss Edith is not there now; she is down at Mr. Croyland's."

"But remember, Kate," continued Layton, "I do not wish my name mentioned to many persons in the house. Indeed, it will be better not to speak of me at all to any one but Zara. It must be soon known that I am here, it is true; but I wish to let events take their course till then. And now, Mrs. Clare, good evening. I shall see you again some day soon; and you must let me know when Kate's wedding-day is fixed."

The mother looked at her daughter with a smile, and Kate blushed and laughed. "It is to be this day week, Sir," answered Mrs. Clare.

Layton nodded his head, saying, "I will not forget," and, mounting his horse at the door, rode away.

"Now, did you find him, Kate?" asked Mrs. Clare, in a low tone, the moment Sir Henry Layton was gone.

"Oh yes," replied her daughter; "the dragoons did not follow me, as you thought they would, mother; and I set down

the basket close to the willow. At first he did not answer when I asked if he wanted anything; but when I spoke again, he said, 'No. A thousand thanks for what you have brought;' and he spoke kind and civilly. Then, just as I was going away, he said, 'Kate, Kate! let me know when the soldiers are gone. — If you could bring me a woman's dress, I could easily get away.' I should not be afraid of going any more, mother," the girl continued; "for he seems quite changed by his misfortune, and not rude and jesting as he always used to be, whenever I saw him before."

The idea of the woman's clothes seemed to strike Mrs. Clare very much; and the good widow and her daughter set their wits to work, to consider how all that was necessary could be procured; for a very serious impediment thrust itself in the way of either mother or child lending him a suit of their own apparel. Neither of them were very tall women; and though young Radford was himself not above the middle height, yet Kate's gown would not have fallen further than half way down his leg; and the poor girl laughed merrily, to think of what a figure he would make dressed in her garments. It would have been the old story of the wolf in sheep's clothing, assuredly.

"If we could but accomplish it, and enable him to escape," thought Mrs. Clare, "especially after Harding has just been up here, it would show Mr. Radford, clearly enough, that John had nothing to do with informing against him." But the question, of where fitting apparel was to be procured, still remained unsettled, till Kate suggested, that perhaps her aunt's, at Glassenbury, might do. "She is very tall," continued the girl, "and I am sure she would lend them to me; for she and my uncle have always been so kind. Suppose I walk over early to-morrow, and ask her."

Now the little farm which Mrs. Clare's brother held, was somewhat more than seven miles off, on the other side of Cranbrook. But still, what is the exertion which woman will not make for a fellow-creature in distress; and Mrs. Clare determined that she would rise betimes, and go to William Harris's herself, certain of a kind reception and ready consent from those who had always

displayed towards her, in adversity, the feelings of affection, which the more worldly-minded generally shower upon prosperity alone.

It was far for her daughter to walk, she thought; and besides, Harding might come, and it would not do for Kate to be absent. Thus had she settled it in her own mind, when Mr. Radford entered the cottage to inquire after his son.

High were the praises that he bestowed upon Kate and Mrs. Clare, for their kindness; and he expressed his warm approval of their little scheme. Nevertheless, he turned the matter in his mind, in order to see whether he could not save Mrs. Clare the trouble of going nearly to Goudhurst, by obtaining the necessary articles of female apparel somewhere else. His own women servants, however, were all short and stout; the only other persons whom he could think of, as at all approaching his son in height, he did not choose to trust; and therefore it was, at length, determined that the original plan should be followed. But the worthy gentleman laid strict injunctions upon Mrs. Clare, to be early in her proceedings, as he feared much, from all he had gathered, that the wood might be more strictly searched, in the course of the following day.

When this was settled, and Mr. Radford had expressed his thanks, more than once, Mrs. Clare thought it a good opportunity of turning the conversation to Harding; and she asked Mr. Radford if he had seen him, adding, "He has gone to look for you, Sir, and seems very quick and angry, because the people down about his place have got a report that he informed about the run; and he fancies you have said so."

"Pooh, nonsense, Mrs. Clare, I never said anything of the kind!" replied Mr. Radford. "It is a story put about by the Custom-House officers themselves, just to cover the persons from whom they had the information. But we shall discover them some day, and pay them handsomely. Tell Harding not to mind what people say, for I never thought of such a thing."

"That I will, Sir," replied the widow; "for I'm sure it will set his mind at rest. — You must know very well, Sir, that he's as honest a man as ever lived."

"To be sure — to be sure," answered Mr. Radford, with great warmth of manner; "no one knows that better than I do, Mrs. Clare."

But whether Mr. Radford really felt the warmth which he assumed, may be another question. His seemings were not always the best indications of his real sentiments; and when he left Mrs. Clare's cottage, after all had been arranged, his first thought was, "We will reckon with Mr. Harding by-and-by. — The account is not made up yet."

Before I proceed to other scenes, it may be as well to go on with the part assigned in this history to Mrs. Clare and her daughter, at least, till the morning of the following day. About eight o'clock at night, Harding returned, still irritable and discontented, having failed to find Mr. Radford. The account, however, which the widow gave of her conversation with that gentleman, soothed him a good deal; but he would not stay the night, as he had done before, saying that he must absolutely be at home as soon as possible, and would return, perhaps, the next day, or, at all events, the day after.

"I must do the best I can, Mrs. Clare," he continued, "to help these fellows out of the scrape they've run into. Two or three of them are good men enough; and, as they risk their necks if they are taken, I should like to get them down, and give them a passage to the other side. So you see I shall be going about here a good deal, for the next four or five days, and will look in, from time to time, to see you and my dear little Kate."

"But are you going to walk all the way back to-night, John?" asked Kate, as he rose to depart.

"No, my love," he answered, "I've got a horse up at Plurendon; but the beast cast a shoe as I was coming, and I was obliged to leave him at the blacksmith's."

No sooner was Harding gone, than a little kindly contest rose between mother and daughter, as to which should go over to Glassenbury; but Mrs. Clare persisted, against all her child's remonstrances; and, in order that they might rise before daylight, both retired to bed early, and slept calmly and peacefully, unknowing what the morrow, to which they both looked anxiously forward,

was to bring. The sun was yet some way below the horizon, when Mrs. Clare set out; but she met with no impediment, and, walking on stoutly, arrived, at an early hour, at a little farm-house, inhabited by her brother. She found farmer Harris and his wife, with their two sons and Mrs. Harris's nephew (three stout, good humoured, young men) seated at their breakfast; and warm and joyful was the reception of Aunt Clare; one joking her upon Kate's approaching marriage; another declaring Jack Harding, whom they all knew, was a capital fellow; and all striving to make her comfortable, and pressing her to partake of their morning meal.

Every one of the party was eager to obtain some information from her, who lived so much nearer to the spot, in regard to the late discomfiture of the smugglers, although none seemed to take any great interest in them, all declaring that the Ramleys, and their gang, were the pest of the country, and that young Dick Radford was not a bit better. Such opinions, regarding that young gentleman, acted as a warning to Mrs. Clare, not to mention the object of the loan she came to solicit; and when, after having rested about twenty minutes, she preferred her petition to Mrs. Harris, it was readily granted by the tall farmer's wife, although not without some expression of curiosity, as to what her sister-in-law could want a dress of hers for.

"Kate or I will bring it back to-night or to-morrow morning," replied Mrs. Clare, "and I'll tell you what we want it for, at the wedding, which, remember, is to be yesterday week."

"Ay, we will all come down with white favours, and our best buckles," said young William, the farmer's eldest son; "and I'll have a kiss of the bride."

A gown and cloak of Mrs. Harris's, having been brought down — they were not her best — and neatly folded up in a shawl-handkerchief, Mrs. Clare set forward on her way home, hurrying her steps as much as possible, lest any untoward event should prevent the execution of her scheme. A stout country woman, accustomed to exercise, the widow accomplished the walk in as short a time as possible; yet it was nine o'clock before she reached the cottage, and she instantly dispatched her daughter to the

“hide” in the wood, with the clothes folded up in as small a space as possible, and laid in the bottom of a basket, covered over with eggs.

The only difficulty was, in regard to a bonnet; and, after earnest consultation between mother and child, it was determined that, as Mrs. Clare's head was somewhat larger than Kate's, her bonnet should be put over her daughter's, which was easily accomplished. Both were of straw, and both were plain enough; but, to conceal the contrivance from the eyes of any one whom Kate might meet, Mrs. Clare pinned a small piece of lace — which had been bought for the wedding — into the inside of her own bonnet, remarking, that it would do to hide young Mr. Radford's face a bit.

Furnished with all that was needful, and having had the instructions which Mr. Radford had left, repeated carefully to her, by her mother, fair Kate Clare set out upon her expedition, passing one of the dragoons, who were still patrolling round the wood, near the place where the road entered it. The man said something to her, as she went by, but did not attempt to follow; and Kate walked on, looking behind her, from time to time, till she was satisfied that her proceedings were unwatched. Then, hurrying on, with a quicker step, she turned to the path, which led to the back of the gardens of Harbourne House, and approached the old willow, and the brushwood which covered the place where Richard Radford was concealed.

“Mr. Radford,” she said, as soon as she was quite close, “Mr. Radford! Here is what you wanted. Take it as fast as you can.”

“Is there any one near but you, Kate?” asked the voice of Richard Radford.

“Oh, no!” she replied; “but the soldiers are still on the outside of the wood watching.”

“I know that,” rejoined the voice again, “for I saw them last night, when I tried to get out. But are you sure that none of them followed you, Kate?”

“Oh, quite sure,” she answered, “for I looked behind all the way!”

"Well, stay and help me to put the things on," said Richard Radford, issuing forth from behind the bushes, like a snake out of its hole. Kate Clare willingly agreed to help him, and while the gown and the cloak were thrown over his other clothes, told him all that his father had said, desiring him not to come up to Radford Hall till he heard more; but to go down to the *lone house*, near Iden Green, where he would find one or two friends already collected.

"Why, these are never your own clothes, Kate!" said young Radford, as she pinned on the gown for him. "They fit as if they were made for me."

"Not at the back," answered Kate, laughing, "I cannot get the gown to meet there; but that will be covered up by the cloak, so it does not matter. — No, they are my aunt's, at Glassenbury; and you must let me have them back, Mr. Radford, as soon as ever you have got to Iden Green; for my mother has promised to return them to-night."

"I don't know how I shall get them back, Kate," answered Richard Radford; "for none of our people will like to venture up here. Can't you come down and fetch them? It is not much out of your way."

"No, I can't do that," answered Kate, who did not altogether like going to the lone house she had mentioned; "but you can send them down to Cranbrook, at all events; and there they can be left for me, at Mrs. Tims's shop. They 'll be quite safe; and I will call for them either to-night or to-morrow morning."

"Well, I will do that, my love," replied Richard Radford, taking the bonnet and putting it on his head.

"Very well, Sir," answered Kate, not well pleased with the epithet he had bestowed upon her, and taking a step to move away, "I will call for them there."

But young Radford threw his arm round her waist, saying, "Come, Kate! I must have a kiss before you go. — You give plenty to Harding, I dare say."

"Let me go, Sir!" cried Kate Clare, indignantly. "You are a base, ungrateful young man!"

But young Radford did not let her go. He took the kiss she

struggled against, by force; and he was proceeding to further insult, when Kate exclaimed, "If you do not let me go, I will scream till the soldiers are upon you. — They are not far."

She spoke so loud, that her very tone excited his alarm; and he withdrew his arm from her waist, but still held her hand tight, saying, "Come, come, Kate! Nonsense, I did not mean to offend you! Go up to Harbourne House, there's a good girl, and stay as long as you can there, till I get out of the wood."

"You do offend me — you do offend me!" cried Kate Clare, striving to withdraw her hand from his grasp.

"Will you promise to go up to Harbourne, then?" said Richard Radford, "and I will let you go."

"Yes, yes," answered Kate, "I will go;" and the moment her hand was free, she darted away, leaving the basket she had brought behind her.

As soon as she was gone, Richard Radford cursed her for a saucy jade, as if the offence had been hers, not his; and then taking up the basket, he threw it, eggs and all, together with his own hat, into the deep hole in the sandbank. Advancing along the path till he reached the open road, he hurried on in the direction of Widow Clare's cottage. Of a daring and resolute disposition — for his only virtue was courage — he thought of passing the soldiers, as a good joke rather than a difficult undertaking; but still recollecting the necessity of caution, as he came near the edge of the wood he slackened his pace, tried to shorten his steps, and assumed a more feminine demeanour. When he was within a couple of hundred yards of the open country, he saw one of the dragoons slowly pass the end of the road and look up; and, on issuing forth from the wood, he perceived that the man had paused, and was gazing back. But at that distance, the female garments which he wore deceived the soldier; and he was suffered to walk on unopposed towards Iden Green.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SIR ROBERT CROYLAND himself did not return to Harbourn House, till the hands of the clock pointed out to every one that went through the hall, that it was twenty minutes past the usual dinner hour; and, though he tried to be as expeditious as he could, he was yet fully ten minutes longer in dressing than usual. He was nervous; he was agitated; all the events of that day had shaken and affected him; he was angry with his servant; and several times he gave the most contradictory orders. Although for years he had been undergoing a slow and gradual change, under the painful circumstances in which he had been placed, and had, from the gay, rash, somewhat noisy and overbearing country gentleman, dwindled down into the cold, silent, pompous, and imperative man of family, yet the alteration during that day had been so great and peculiar that the valet could not help remarking it, and wondering if his master was ill.

Sir Robert tried to smoothe his look and compose his manner for the drawing-room, however; and when he entered, he gazed round for Sir Edward Digby, observing aloud: "Why, I thought soldiers were more punctual. However, as it happens, to-day I am glad Sir Edward is not down."

"Down!" cried Mrs. Barbara, who had a grand objection to dinners being delayed; "why, he is out; but you could expect no better; for yesterday you were so long that the fish was done to rags; so I ordered it not to be put in till he made his appearance."

"I told you, my dear aunt, that he said he might not be back before dinner," replied her niece, "and, therefore, it will be vain to wait for him. He desired me to say so, Papa."

"Oh yes! Zara knows all about it," said Mrs. Barbara, with a shrewd look; "they were talking together for ten minutes in the library; and I cannot get her to tell me what it was about."

It is, indeed, conscience that makes cowards of us all; and had the fair girl's conversation with her new friend been on any other subject than that to which it related — had it been about love, marriage, arms, or divinity, she would have found no

difficulty in parrying her aunt's observations, however mal-à-propos they might have been. At present, however, she was embarrassed by doubts of the propriety of what she was doing, more especially as she felt sure that her father would be inquisitive and suspicious, if the tale the maid had told was true. Acting, however, as she not unfrequently did, in any difficulty, she met Mrs. Barbara's inuendoes at once, replying, "Indeed I shall not say anything about it to any one, my dear aunt. I will manage some matters for myself; and the only thing I shall repeat is Sir Edward's last dying speech, which was to the effect, that he feared he might be detained till after our dinner hour, but would be back as soon as ever he could, and trusted my father would not wait."

"Do you know where he is gone, and why?" asked Sir Robert Croyland, in a much quieter tone than she expected. But poor Zara was still puzzled for an answer; and, as her only resource, she replied vaguely, "Something about some of the smugglers, I believe."

"Then had he any message or intelligence brought him?" inquired Sir Robert Croyland.

"I do not know — Oh, yes, I believe he had," replied his daughter, in a hesitating tone and with a cheek that was beginning to grow red. "He spoke with one of the soldiers at the corner of the road, I know; — and, oh yes, I saw a man ride up with a letter."

"That was after he was gone," observed Mrs. Barbara; but Sir Robert paid little attention, and, ringing, ordered dinner to be served. Could we see into the breasts of others, we should often save ourselves a great deal of unnecessary anxiety. Zara forgot that her father was not as well aware that Sir Edward Digby was Layton's dearest friend, as she was; but, in truth, all that he concluded — either from the pertinent remarks of Mrs. Barbara or from Zara's embarrassment — was, that the young baronet had been making a little love to his daughter, which, to say sooth, was a consummation that Sir Robert Croyland was not a little inclined to see.

In about a quarter of an hour more, the dinner was announced;

and the master of the house, his sister, and Zara, sat down together. Hardly had the fish and soup made any progress, when the quick canter of Sir Edward Digby's horse put his fair confidante out of her anxiety; and, in a few minutes after, he appeared himself, and apologized gracefully to his host, for having been too late. "You must have waited for me, I fear," he added, "for it is near an hour after the time; but I thought it absolutely necessary, from some circumstances I heard, to go over and see my Colonel before he returned to Hythe, and then I was detained."

"Pray, who does command your regiment?" asked Mrs. Barbara. But Sir Edward Digby was, at that moment, busily engaged in taking his seat by Zara's side; and he did not hear. The lady repeated the question when he was seated; but then he replied, "No, I thank you, my dear Madam, no soup to-day — a solid meal always after a hard ride; and I have galloped till I have almost broken my horse's wind. — By the way, Sir Robert, I hope you found my bay a pleasant goer. I have only ridden him twice since I bought him, though he cost two hundred guineas."

"He is well worth the money," replied the Baronet — "a very powerful animal — bore me like a feather, and I ride a good weight."

"Have your own horses come back?" asked the young officer, with a laugh.

Sir Robert Croyland answered in the negative, adding, "And that reminds me I must write to my brother, to let Edith have his carriage to-morrow, to bring her back; for mine are gone — coach-horses, and all."

"Edith, to-morrow!" exclaimed Mrs. Barbara, in surprise; "why, I thought she was going to stay four or five days."

"She is coming back to-morrow, Bab," replied Sir Robert, sharply; and instantly turned the conversation.

During the rest of the evening, Sir Edward Digby remained very constantly by fair Zara's side; and, moreover, he paid her most particular attention, in so marked a manner, that both Sir Robert Croyland and Mrs. Barbara thought matters were taking their course very favourably. The father busied himself in writing

a letter and one or two notes, which he pronounced to be of consequence — as, indeed, they really were — while the aunt, worked diligently and discreetly at embroidering, not interrupting the conference of her niece and their guest above ten times in a minute. Sir Edward, indeed, kept himself within all due and well-defined rules. He never proceeded beyond what a great master of the art has pronounced to be “making love” — “a course of small, quiet, attentions, not so pointed as to alarm, nor so vague as to be misunderstood.” Strange to say, Zara was very much obliged to him for following such a course, as it gave an especially good pretext for intimacy, for whispered words and quiet conversation, and even for a little open seeking for each other’s society, which would have called observation, if not inquiry, upon them, had not her companion’s conduct been what it was. She thought fit to attribute it, in her own mind, entirely to his desire of communicating to her, without attracting notice, whatever he had learned, that could in any way affect her sister’s fate; and she judged it a marvellous good device that they should appear for the time as lovers, with full powers on both parts to withdraw from that position whenever it suited them. Poor girl! she knew not how far she was entangling herself.

Sir Edward Digby, in the meanwhile, took no alarming advantage of his situation. The whispered word was almost always of Edith or of Layton. He never spoke of Zara herself, or of himself, or of his own feelings; not a word could denote to her that he was making love, though his whole demeanour had very much that aspect to those who sat and looked on. Oh, those who sit and look on, what a world they see! and what a world they don’t see! Ever more than those who play the game, be they shrewd as they may: ever less than the cards would show, were they turned up. By fits and snatches, he communicated to his fair companion, while he was playing with this ball of gold thread, or winding and unwinding that piece of crimson silk, as much of what had passed between himself and Sir Henry Layton, as he thought necessary; and then he asked her to sing — as her aunt had given him a quiet hint that her niece did sometimes do such a thing — saying, in a low tone, while he preferred the request, “Pray, go on with the

song, though I may interrupt you sometimes with questions, not quite relevant to the subject."

"I understand — I quite understand," answered Zara; but it may be a question whether that sweet girl really quite understood either herself or him. It is impossible that any two free hearts, can go on long, holding such intimate and secret communion, on subjects deeply interesting to both, without being drawn together by closer bonds, than perhaps they fancy can ever be established between them — unless there be something inherently repulsive on one part or the other. Propinquity is certainly much, in the matter of love; but there are circumstances, not rarely occurring in human life, which mightily abridge the process; and such are — difficulties and dangers experienced together — a common struggle for a common object — but more than all — mutual and secret communion with, and aid of each other in things of deep interest. The confidence that is required, the excitement of imagination, the unity of effort, and of purpose, the rapid exercise of mind to catch the half-uttered thought, the enforced candour from want of time, which admits of no disguise or circumlocution, the very mystery itself — all cast that magic chain around those so circumstanced, within which they can hardly escape from the power of love. Nine times out of ten, they never try; and, however Zara Croyland might feel, she rose willingly enough to sing, while Sir Edward Digby leaned over her chair, as she sat at the instrument, which in those days supplied the place of that which is now absurdly enough termed in England, a piano. Her voice, which was fine though not very powerful, wavered a little as she began, from emotions of many kinds. She wished to sing well; but she sang worse than she might have done; yet quite well enough to please Sir Edward Digby, though his ear was refined by art, and good by nature. Nevertheless, though he listened with delight, and felt the music deeply, he forgot not his purpose, and between each stanza asked some question, obtaining a brief reply. But I will not so interrupt the course of an old song, and will give the interrogatory a separate place:

THE LADY'S SONG.

"Oh! there be many, many griefs,
 In this world's sad career,
 That shun the day, that fly the gaze,
 And never, never meet the ear.

But what is darkest — darkest of them all?
 The pang of love betray'd? —
 The hopes of youth all fleeting by —
 Spring flowers that early, early fade?

But there are griefs — ay, griefs as deep:
 The friendship turn'd to hate —
 And, deeper still — and deeper still,
 Repentance come too late! — too late!

The doubt of those we love; and more
 The rayless, dull despair,
 When trusted hearts are worthless found,
 And all our dreams are air — but air.

Deep in each bosom's secret cell,
 The hermit-sorrows lie;
 And thence — unheard on earth — they raise
 The voice of prayer on high — on high.

Oh! there be many, many griefs,
 In this world's sad career,
 That shun the day, that fly the gaze,
 And, never, never meet the ear."

Thus sang the lady; and one of her hearers, at least, was delighted with the sweet voice, and the sweet music, and the expression which she gave to the whole. But though he listened with deep attention, both to words and tones, as long as her lips moved, yet, when the mere instrumental part of the music recommenced, which was the case between every second and third stanza — and the symphonetic parts of every song were somewhat long in those days — he instantly remembered the object with which he had first asked her to sing, (little thinking that such pleasure would be his reward;) and bending down his head, as if he were paying her some lover-like compliment on her performance, he asked her quietly, as I have said before, a question or two, closely connected with the subject on which both their minds were at that moment principally bent.

Thus, at the first pause, he inquired — “Do you know — did you ever see, in times long past, a gentleman of the name of Warde — a clergyman — a good and clever man, but somewhat strange and wild?”

“No,” answered Zara, looking down at the keys of the harpsichord; “I know no one of that name;” and she recommenced the song.

When her voice again ceased, the young officer seemed to have thought further; and he asked, in the same low tone, “Did you ever know a gentleman answering that description — his features must once have been good — somewhat strongly marked, but fine and of an elevated expression, with a good deal of wildness in the eye, but a peculiarly bland and beautiful smile when he is pleased — too remarkable to be overlooked or forgotten?”

“Can you be speaking of Mr. Osborn?” asked Zara, in return. “I barely recollect him in former days; but I and Edith met him about ten days ago; and he remembered and spoke to her.”

The song required her attention; and though she would fain have played the symphony over again, she was afraid her father would remark it, and went on to sing the last two stanzas. As soon as she had concluded, however, she said, in a low, quick voice, “He is a very extraordinary man.”

“Can you give me any sign by which I should know him?” asked Digby.

“He has now got a number of blue lines traced on his face,” answered Zara; “he went abroad to preach to the savages, I have heard. He is a good man, but very eccentric.”

At the same moment the voice of her father was raised, saying, “I wish, my dear, you would not sing such melancholy things as that. Cannot you find something gayer? I do not like young ladies singing such dull ditties, only fit for sentimental misses of the true French school.”

What was the true French school of his day, I cannot tell. Certainly, it must have been very different from the present.

“Perhaps Sir Edward will sing something more cheerful himself?” answered Zara.

“Oh, I am a very bad musician,” replied the young officer;

"I cannot even accompany myself. If you will, and have any of the few things I know, I shall be very happy. — In everything, one can but try," he added, in a low voice, "still hoping for the best."

Zara looked over her collection of music with him; and at last she opened one song which was somewhat popular in those times, though it has long fallen into well-merited oblivion. "Can you venture to sing that?" she asked, pointing to the words rather than the music; "it is quite a soldier's song."

Sir Edward Digby read the first line; and thinking he observed a double meaning in her question, he answered, "Oh, yes, that I will, if you will consent to accompany me."

Zara smiled, and sat down to the instrument again; and the reader must judge from the song itself whether the young officer's conjecture that her words had an enigmatical sense was just or not.

THE OFFICER'S SONG.

"A star is still beaming
Beyond the grey cloud;
Its light rays are streaming,
With nothing to shroud;
And the star shall be there
When the clouds pass away;
Its lustre unchanging,
Immortal its ray.

"T is the guide of the true heart,
In field, or on sea;
'T is the hope of the slave,
And the trust of the free;
The light of the lover,
Whatever assail;
The strength of the honest,
That never can fail.

"Waft, waft, thou light wind,
From the peace-giving ray,
The vapours of sorrow,
That over it stray;
And let it pour forth,
All unshrouded and bright,
That those who now mourn,
May rejoice in its light."

"God grant it!" murmured the voice of Sir Robert Croyland. Zara said, "Amen," in her heart; and in a minute or two after, her father rose, and left the room.

During the rest of the evening, nothing very important occurred in Harbourne House. Mrs. Barbara played her usual part, and would contribute to Sir Edward Digby's amusement in a most uncomfortable manner. The following morning, too, went by without any incident of importance, till about ten o'clock, when breakfast just being over, and Zara having been called from the room by her maid, Sir Robert's butler announced to his master, that the groom had returned from Mr. Croyland's.

"Where is the note?" demanded his master, eagerly.

"He has not brought one, Sir Robert," replied the servant, "only a message, Sir, to say that Mr. Croyland is very sorry he cannot spare the horses to-day, as they were out a long way yesterday."

Sir Robert Croyland started up in a state of fury not at all becoming. He stamped, he even swore. But we have got rid of a great many of the vices of those times; and swearing was so common at the period I speak of, that it did not even startle Mrs. Barbara. Her efforts, however, to soothe her brother, only served to irritate him the more; and next he swore at her, which did surprise her mightily.

He then fell into a fit of thought, which ended in his saying aloud, "Yes, that must be the way. It is his business, and so —" But Sir Robert did not conclude the sentence, retiring to his own sitting-room, and there writing a letter.

When he had done, he paused and meditated, his mind rambling over many subjects, though still occupied intensely with only one. "I am a most unfortunate man," he thought. "Nothing since that wretched day has ever gone right with me. Even trifles combine to frustrate everything I attempt. Would I had died many years ago! Poor Edith — poor girl — she must know more sorrow still, and yet it must be done, or I am lost! — If that wretched youth had been killed in that affray yesterday, it would have all been over. Was there no bullet that could find him? — and yet, perhaps, it might not have had the effect. — No, no;

there would have been some new kind of demand from that greedy, craving scoundrel. — May there not be such even now? Will he give up that fatal paper? — He shall — by Heaven, he shall! — But I must send the letter. Sir Edward Digby will think this all very strange. How unfortunate, that it should have happened just when he was here. Would to Heaven I had any one to consult with! But I am lone, lone indeed. My wife, my sons, my friends, — gone, gone, all gone! It is very sad;” and after having mused for several minutes more, he rang the bell, gave the servant who appeared the letter which he had just written, and directed him to take it over to Mr. Radford’s as soon as possible.

Returning to the room which he had previously left — without bestowing one word upon Mrs. Barbara, whom he passed in the corridor, Sir Robert Croyland entered into conversation with Sir Edward Digby, and strove — though with too evident an effort — to appear careless and unconcerned.

In the meantime, however, we must notice what was passing in the corridor; for it was of some importance, though, like many other important things, it was transacted very quietly.

Mrs. Barbara had overheard Sir Robert’s directions to the servant; and she had seen the man — as he went away to get ready the pony, which was usually sent in the morning to the post — deposit the note he had received upon an antique piece of furniture — a large marble table, with great sprawling gilt legs — which stood in the hall, close to the double doors that led to the offices.

Now, Mrs. Barbara was one of the most benevolent people upon earth: she literally overflowed with the milk of human kindness; and, if a few drops of that same milk occasionally spotted the apron of her morality, which we cannot help acknowledging was sometimes the case, she thought, as a great many other people do of a great many other sins, that “there was no great harm in it, if the motive was good.” This was one of those cases and occasions when the milk was beginning to run over. She had a deep regard for her brother: she would have sacrificed her right hand for him; and she was quite sure that something very sad had happened to vex him, or he never would have thought of swearing *at her*. She would have done, she was ready to do, anything in

the world, to help him; but how could she help him, without knowing what he was vexed about? It is wonderful how many lines the devil always has out, for those who are disposed to take a bait. Something whispered to Mrs. Barbara, as she gazed at the letter, "The whole story is in there!" Ah, Mrs. Barbara, do not take it up, and look at the address! — It is dangerous — very dangerous.

But Mrs. Barbara did take it up, and looked at the address — and then at the two ends. It was folded as a note, unfortunately; and she thought — "There can be no harm, I'm sure — I won't open it — though I've seen him open Edith's letters, poor thing! — I shall hear the man pull back the inner door, and can put it down in a minute. Nobody else can see me here; and if I could but find out what is vexing him, I might have some way of helping him; I'm sure I intend well."

All this argumentation in Mrs. Barbara's mind took up the space of about three seconds; and then the note, pressed between two fingers in the most approved fashion, was applied as a telescope to her eye, to get a perspective view of the cause of her brother's irritation. I must make the reader a party to the transaction, I am afraid, and let him know the words which Mrs. Barbara read: —

"My dear Radford," the note began — "As misfortune would have it, all my horses have been taken out of the stable, and have not been brought back. I fear that they have fallen into other hands than those that borrowed them; and my brother Zachary has one of his crabbed moods upon him, and will not lend his carriage to bring Edith back. If your horses have not gone as well as mine, I should feel particularly obliged by your sending them down here, to take over my coach to Zachary's and bring Edith back; for I do not wish her to stay there any longer, as the marriage is to take place so soon. If you can come over to-morrow, we can settle whether it is to be at your house or here — though I should prefer it here, if you have no objection."

There seemed to be a few words more; but it took Mrs. Barbara longer to decipher the above lines, in the actual position of the note, than it might have done, had the paper been spread out

fair before her; so that, just as she was moving it a little, to get at the rest, the sound of the farther of the two doors being thrown open, interrupted her proceedings; and, laying down the letter quickly, she darted away, full of the important intelligence which she had acquired.

CHAPTER XXX.

THERE are periods in the life of some men, when, either by a concatenation of unfortunate events, or by the accumulated consequences of their own errors, the prospect on every side becomes so clouded, that there is no resource for them, but to shut their eyes to the menacing aspect of all things, and to take refuge in the moral blindness of thoughtless inaction, against the pressure of present difficulties. "I dare not think," is the excuse of many a man, for continuing in the same course of levity which first brought misfortunes upon him; but such is not always the case with those who fly to wretched merriment in the hour of distress; and such was not the case with Sir Robert Croyland.

He had thought for long years, till his very heart sickened at the name of reflection. He had looked round for help, and had found none. He had tried to discover some prospect of relief; and all was darkness. The storm he had long foreseen was now bursting upon his head; it was no longer to be delayed; it was not to be warded off. His daughter's misery, or his own destruction, was the only choice before him; and he was resolved to think no more — to let events take their course, and to meet them as he best might.

But to resolve is one thing — to execute, another; and Edith's father was not a man who could keep such a determination long. He might indeed, for a time, cease to think of all the painful particulars of his situation; but there will ever come moments when thought is forced even upon the thoughtless, and events will arise, to press reflection upon any heart. His efforts were, at first, very successful. After he had despatched the letter to Mr. Radford, he had said, "I must really pay my visitor some attention. It will serve to occupy my mind, too. Anything to escape from the tor-

turing consideration of questions, which must ever be solved in wretchedness." And when he returned to Sir Edward Digby, his conversation was particularly gay and cheerful. It first turned to the unpleasant fact of the abstraction of all his horses; but he now spoke of it in a lighter and less careful manner than before.

"Doubtless," he said, "they have been taken without leave, as usual, by the smugglers, to use for their own purposes. It is quite a common practice in this county; and yet we all go on leaving our stable-doors open, as if to invite all who pass to enter, and choose what they like. Then, I suppose, they have been captured with other spoil, in the strife of yesterday morning, and are become the prize of the conquerors; so that I shall never see them again."

"Oh, no!" answered the young officer, "they will be restored, I am quite sure, upon your identifying them, and proving that they were taken, without your consent, by the smugglers. I shall go over to Woodchurch by-and-by; and if you please, I will claim them for you."

"It is scarcely worth while," replied the baronet; "I doubt that I shall ever get them back. These are little losses which every man in this neighbourhood must suffer, as a penalty for remaining in a half savage part of the country. — What are you disposed to do this morning, Sir Edward? Do you again walk the stubbles?"

"I fear it would be of little use," answered Digby; "there has been so much galloping lately, that I do not think a partridge has been left undisturbed in its furrow; and the sun is too high for much sport."

"Well, then, let us walk in the garden for a little," said Sir Robert; "it is curious, in some respects, having been laid out long before this house was built, antiquated as it is."

Sir Edward Digby assented, but looked round for Zara, as he certainly thought her society would be a great addition to her father's. She had not yet returned to the room, however; and Sir Robert, as if he divined his young companion's feelings, requested his sister to tell her niece, when she came, that he and their guest were walking in the garden. "It is one of her favourite spots, Sir Edward," he continued, as they went out, "and many a medi-

tative hour she spends there; for, gay as she is, she has her fits of thought, too."

The young baronet internally said, "Well she may, in this house!" but making a more civil answer to his entertainer, he followed him to the garden; and so well and even cheerfully did Sir Robert Croyland keep up the conversation, so learnedly did he descant upon the levelling and preservation of turf in bowling-greens, and upon the clipping of old yew-trees — both before and after Zara joined them — that Digby began to doubt, notwithstanding all he had heard, whether he could really have such a load upon his heart as he himself had stated to Edith, and to fancy that, after all, it might be a stratagem to drive her to compliance with his wishes.

A little incident, of no great moment in the eyes of any one but a very careful observer of his fellow-men — and Digby was far more so than he seemed — soon settled the doubt. As they were passing under an old wall of red brick — channelled by time and the shoots of pears and peaches — which separated the garden from the different courts, a door suddenly opened behind them, just after they had passed it; and while Sir Edward's eyes were turned to the face of the master of the house, Sir Robert's ear instantly caught the sound, and his cheek became as pale as ashes.

"There is some dark terror there!" thought the young officer; but, turning to Zara, he finished the sentence he had been uttering, while her father's coachman, who was the person that had opened the door, came forward to say that one of the horses had returned.

"Returned!" exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland; "has been brought back, I suppose you mean?"

"Ay, Sir Robert," replied the man; "a fellow from the lone house by Iden Green brought him; and in a sad state the poor beast is. He's got a cut, like with a knife, all down his shoulder."

"Your dragoon swords are sharp, Sir Edward," said the old baronet, gaily, to his guest; "however, I will go and see him myself, and rejoin you here in a minute."

"I am so glad to have a moment alone," cried Zara, as soon as her father was gone, "that you must forgive me if I use it di-

rectly. I am going to ask you a favour, Sir Edward. You must take me a ride, and lend me a horse. I have just had a message from poor Harry Layton; he wishes to see me, but I am afraid to go alone, with so many soldiers about."

"Are they such terrible animals?" asked her companion, with a smile, adding, however, "I shall be delighted, if your father will consent; for I have already told him that I am going to Woodchurch this afternoon."

"Oh! you must ask me yourself, Sir Edward," replied Zara, "quite in a civil tone; and then when you see that I am willing, you must be very pressing with my father — quite as if you were a lover; and he will not refuse you. — I'll bear you harmless, as I have heard Mr. Radford say;" she added, with a playful smile that was quickly saddened.

"You shall command for the time," answered Digby, as gaily; "perhaps after that, I may take my turn, sweet lady. But I have a good deal to say to you, too, which I could not fully explain last night."

"As we go — as we go," replied Zara; "my father will be back directly, otherwise I would tell you a long story about my aunt, who has evidently got some great secret which she is all impatience to divulge. If I had stayed an hour with her, I might have arrived at it; but I was afraid of losing my opportunity here. — Oh, that invaluable thing, opportunity! Once lost, what years of misery does it not sometimes leave behind. — Would to Heaven that Edith and Layton had run away with each other when they were about it. — We should all have been happier now."

"And I should never have known you," replied Digby. Zara smiled, and shook her head, as if saying, "That is hardly fair;" but Sir Robert Croyland was seen coming up the walk; and she only replied, "Now do your *devoir*, gallant knight, and let me see if you do it zealously."

"I have been trying in your absence, my dear Sir," said Digby, rather maliciously, as the baronet joined them, "to persuade your fair daughter to run away with me. But she is very dutiful, and will not take such a rash step, though the distance is only to Woodchurch, without your consent. I pray you give

it; for I long to mount her on my quietest horse, and see her try her skill in horsemanship again."

Sir Robert Croyland looked grave; and ere the words were half spoken, Sir Edward Digby felt that he had committed an error in his game; for he was well aware that when we have a favour to ask, we should not call up, by speech or look, in the mind of the person who is to grant it, any association having a contrary tendency.

"I am afraid that I have no servant whom I could send with you, Sir Edward," replied her father; "one I have just dispatched to some distance, and you know I am left without horses, for this poor beast just come back, is unfit. Neither do I think it would be altogether consistent with decorum, for Zara to go with you quite alone."

Sir Edward Digby mentally sent the word decorum back to the place from whence it came; but he was resolved to press his point; and when Zara replied, "Oh, do let me go, Papa!" he added, "My servant can accompany us, to satisfy propriety, Sir Robert; and you know I have quartered three horses upon you. Then, as I find the fair lady is somewhat afraid of a multitude of soldiers, I promise most faithfully not even to dismount in Woodchurch, but to say what I have to say, to the officer in command there, and then canter back over the country."

"Who is the officer in command?" asked Sir Robert Croyland.

Zara drew her breath quick, but Sir Edward Digby avoided the dangerous point. "Irby has one troop there," he replied; "and there are parts of two others. When I have made interest enough here," he continued, with a half bow to Zara, "I shall beg to introduce Irby to you, Sir Robert; you will like him much, I think. I have known him long."

"Pray invite him to dinner while he stays," said Sir Robert Croyland; "it will give me much pleasure to see him."

"Not yet — not yet!" answered Digby, laughing; "I always secure my own approaches first."

Sir Robert Croyland smiled graciously, and, turning to Zara, said, "Well, my dear, I see no objection, if you wish it. You had better go and get ready."

Zara's cheek was glowing, and she took her father at the first word; but when she was gone, Sir Robert thought fit to lecture his guest a little, upon the bad habit of spoiling young ladies which he seemed to have acquired. He did it jocularly, but with his usual pompous and grave air; and no one would have recognised in the Sir Robert Croyland walking in the garden, the father whom we have lately seen humbled before his own child. There is no part of a man's character which he keeps up so well to the world as that part which is not his own. The assertion may seem to be a contradiction in terms; but there is no other way of expressing the sense clearly; and whether those terms be correct or not, will depend upon whether character is properly innate or accumulated.

Sir Edward Digby answered gaily, for it was his object to keep his host in good humour — at least, for the time. He denied the possibility of spoiling a lady, while he acknowledged his propensity to attempt impossibilities in that direction; and at the same time, with a good grace, and a frankness, real yet assumed — for his words were true, though they might not have been spoken just then, under any other circumstances — he admitted that, of all people whom he should like to spoil, the fair being who had just left them was the foremost. The words were too decided to be mistaken. Sir Edward Digby was evidently a gentleman, and known to be a man of honour. No man of honour trifles with a woman's affections; and Sir Robert Croyland, wise in this instance if not in others, did as all wise fathers would do, held his tongue for a time that the matter might cool and harden, and then changed the subject.

Digby, however, had grown thoughtful. Did he repent what he had said? No, certainly not. He wished, indeed, that he had not been driven to say it so soon; for there were doubts in his own mind whether Zara herself were altogether won. She was frank, she was kind, she trusted him, she acted with him; but there was at times a shade of reserve about her, coming suddenly, which seemed to him as a warning. She had from the first taken such pains to ensure that her confidence — the confidence of circumstances — should not be misunderstood; she had responded

so little to the first approaches of love, while she had yielded so readily to those of friendship, that there was a doubt in his mind which made him uneasy; and, every now and then, her uncle's account of her character rung in his ear, and made him think — "I have found this artillery more dangerous than I expected."

What a pity it is that uncles will not hold their tongues!

At length, he bethought him that it would be as well to order the horses, which was accordingly done; and some time before they were ready, the fair girl herself appeared, and continued walking up and down the garden with her father and their guest, looking very lovely, both from excitement, which gave a varying colour to her cheek, and from intense feelings, which, denied the lips, looked out with deeper soul from the eyes.

"I think, Zara," said Sir Robert Croyland, when it was announced that the horses and the servant were ready, "that you took Sir Edward to the north, when you went over to your uncle's. You had better, therefore, in returning — for I know, in your wild spirits, when once on horseback, you will not be contented with the straight road — you had better, I say, come by the southwest."

"Oh, Papa, I could never learn the points of the compass in my life!" answered Zara, laughing; "I suppose that is the reason why, as my aunt says, I steer so ill."

"I mean — by the lower road," replied her father; and he laid such emphasis on the words, that Zara received them as a command.

They mounted and set out, much to the surprise of Mrs. Barbara Croyland, who saw them from the window, and thence derived her first information of their intended expedition; for Zara was afraid of her aunt's kindnesses, and never encountered them when she could help it. When they were a hundred yards from the house, the conversation began; but I will not enter into all the details; for at first they related to facts with which the reader is already well acquainted. Sir Edward Digby told her at large, all that had passed between himself and Layton on the preceding day, and Zara, in return, informed him of the message she had received from his friend, and how it had been conveyed. Their minds

then turned to other things, or rather to other branches of the same subjects; and, what was to be done? was the next question; for hours were flying — the moment that was to decide the fate of the two beings in whom each felt a deep though separate interest, was approaching fast; and no progress had apparently been made.

Zara's feelings seemed as much divided as Edith's had been. She shrank from the thought, that her sister, whom she loved with a species of adoration, should sacrifice herself on any account to such a fate as that which must attend the wife of Richard Radford. She shrank also, as a young, generous woman's heart must ever shrink, from the thought of any one wedding the abhorred, and separating for ever from the beloved; but then, when she came to turn her eyes towards her father, she trembled for him as much as for Edith; and, with her two hands resting on the pommel of the saddle, she gazed down in anxious and bitter thought.

"I know not your father as well as you do, my dear Miss Croyland," said her companion, at length, as he marked these emotions; "and therefore I cannot tell what might be his conduct under particular circumstances." Zara suddenly raised her eyes, and fixed them on his face; but Digby continued, "I do not speak of the past, but of the future. I take it for granted — not alone as a courtesy, but from all I have seen — that Sir Robert Croyland cannot have committed any act, that could justly render him liable to danger from the law."

"Thank you — thank you!" said Zara, dropping her eyes again; "you judge rightly, I am sure."

"But at the same time," he proceeded, "it is clear that some unfortunate concurrence of circumstances has placed him either really, or in imagination, in Mr. Radford's power. Now, would he but act a bold and decided part — dare the worst — discountenance a bad man and a villain — even, if necessary, in his magisterial capacity, treat him as he deserves — he would take away the sting from his malice. Any accusation this man might bring would have *enmity* too strongly written upon it, to carry

much weight; and all the evidence in favour of your father would have double force."

"He cannot — he will not," answered Zara, sadly, "unless he be actually driven. I know no more than you, Sir Edward, how all this has happened; but I know my father, and I know that he shrinks from disgrace more than death. An accusation, a public trial, would kill him by the worst and most terrible kind of torture. Mr. Radford, too, has wound the toils round him completely — that I can see. He could say that Sir Robert Croyland has acted contrary to all his own principles, at his request; and he could point to the cause. He could say that Sir Robert Croyland suddenly became, and has been for years the most intimate friend and companion of a man he scorned and avoided; and he could assert that it was because the proud man was in the cunning man's power. If, for vengeance, he chooses to avow his own disgrace — and what is there not Mr. Radford would avow to serve his ends? — believe me, he has my father in a net, from which it will be difficult to disentangle him."

They both fell into thought again; but Zara did not sink in Digby's estimation, from the clear and firm view which she took of her father's position.

"Well," he said, at length, "let us wait, and hear what poor Layton has to tell you. Perhaps he may have gained some further insight, or may have formed some plan; and now, Zara, let us for a moment speak of ourselves. You see, to-day, I have been forced to make love to you."

"Too much," said Zara, gravely. "I am sure you intended it for the best; but I am sorry it could not be avoided."

"And yet it is very pleasant," answered Digby, half jestingly, half seriously.

Zara seemed agitated: "Do not, do not!" she replied; "my mind is too full of sad things, to think of what might be pleasant or not at another time;" and she turned a look towards him, in which kindness, entreaty, and seriousness were all so blended, that it left him in greater doubt than ever, as to her sensations. "Besides," she added, the serious predominating in her tone, "consider what a difference one rash word, on either part, may

make between us. Let me regard you, at least for the present, as a friend — or a brother, as you once said, Digby; let me take counsel with you, seek your advice, call for your assistance, without one thought or care to shackle or restrain me. In pity, do; for you know not how much I need support."

"Then I am most ready to give it, on your own terms, and in your own way," answered Digby, warmly; but, immediately afterwards, he fell into a reverie, and in his own mind thought — "She is wrong in her view; or indifferent towards me. With a lover to whom all is acknowledged, and with whom all is decided, she would have greater confidence, than with a friend, towards whom the dearest feelings of the heart are in doubt. This must be resolved speedily, but not now; for it evidently agitates her too much. — Yet, after all, in that agitation is hope."

Just as his meditations had reached this point, they passed by the little public-house of the Chequers, then a very favourite sign in England, and especially in that part of the country; and in five minutes after, they perceived a horseman on the road, riding rapidly towards them.

"There is Layton," said Sir Edward Digby, as he came somewhat nearer; but Zara gazed forward with surprise, at the tall, manly figure, dressed in the handsome uniform of the time, the pale but noble countenance, and the calm commanding air. "Impossible!" she cried. "Why, he was a gay, slight, florid, young man."

"Six or seven years ago," answered Digby; "but that, my dear Miss Croyland, is Sir Henry Layton, depend upon it."

Now, it may seem strange that Edith should have instantly recognised, even at a much greater distance, the man whom her sister did not, though the same period had passed since each had seen him; but, it must be remembered, that Edith was between two and three years older than Zara; and those two or three years, at the time of life which they had reached when Layton left England, are amongst the most important in a woman's life — those when new feelings and new thoughts arise, to impress for ever, on the woman's heart, events and persons that the girl forgets in an hour.

Layton, however, it certainly was; and when Zara could see his features distinctly, she recalled the lines. Springing from his horse as soon as he was near, her sister's lover cast the bridle of his charger over his arm, and, taking the hand she extended to him, kissed it affectionately: "Oh, Zara, how you are changed!" he said. "But so am I; and you have gained, whilst I have lost. It is very kind of you to come thus speedily."

"You could not doubt, Layton, that I would, if possible," answered Zara; "but all things are much changed in our house, as well as ourselves; and that wild liberty which we formerly enjoyed, of running whithersoever we would, is sadly abridged now. But what have you to say, Layton? for I dare not stay long."

Digby was dropping behind, apparently to speak to his servant for a moment; but Layton called to him, assuring him that he had nothing to say, which he might not hear.

"Presently, presently," answered Zara's companion; and leaving them alone, he rode up to good Mr. Somers, who, with his usual discretion, had halted, as they halted, at a very respectful distance. The young officer seemed to give some orders, which were rather long, and then returned at a slow pace. In the meantime, the conversation of Layton and Zara had gone on; but his only object, it appeared, was to see her, and to entreat her to aid and support his Edith in any trial she might be put to. "I spent a short period of chequered happiness with her last night," he said; "and she then told me, dear Zara, that she was sure her father would send for her in the course of this day. If such be the case, keep with her always as far as possible; bid her still remember Harry Layton; bid her resist to the end; and assure her that he will come to her deliverance ultimately. Were it myself alone, I would sacrifice anything, and set her free; but when I know that, by so doing, I should make her wretched for ever — that her own heart would be broken, and nothing but an early death relieve her, I cannot do it, Zara — no one can expect it."

"Perhaps not — perhaps not, Layton;" answered Zara, with the tears in her eyes; "but yet — my father! However, I cannot advise — I cannot even ask anything. All is so dark and perplexed, I am lost!"

"I am labouring now, dear Zara," replied the young officer, "to find or devise means of rendering his safety sure. Already I have the power to crush the bad man in whose grasp he is, and render his testimony, whatever it may be, nearly valueless. At all events, the only course before us, is that which I have pointed out; and while Digby is with you, you can never want the best and surest counsel and assistance. You may confide in him fully, Zara. I have now known him many years; and a more honourable and upright man, or one of greater talent, does not live."

There was something very gratifying to Zara in what he said of his friend; and had she been in a mood to scrutinize her own feelings accurately, the pleasure that she experienced in hearing such words spoken of Sir Edward Digby — the agitated sort of pleasure — might have given her an insight into her own heart. As it was, it only sent a passing blush into her cheek, and she replied, "I am sure he is all you say, Harry; and indeed, it is to his connivance that I owe my being able to come hither to-day. These smugglers took away all my father's horses; and I suppose, from what I hear, that some of them have been captured by your men."

"If such is the case they shall be sent back," replied Layton; "for I am well aware that the horses being found with the smugglers, is no proof that they were there with the owner's consent. To-morrow, I trust to be able to give you a further insight into my plans, for I am promised some information of importance to-night; and perhaps, even before you reach home, I shall have put a bar against Mr. Richard Radford's claims to Edith, which he may find insurmountable."

As he was speaking, Sir Edward Digby returned, quickening his horse's pace as he came near, and pointing with his hand. "You have got a detachment out, I see, Layton," he said — "Is there any new affair before you?"

"Oh, no," replied the Colonel, "it is merely Irby and a part of his troop, whom I have despatched to search the wood, for I have certain intelligence that the man we are seeking is concealed there."

"They may save themselves the trouble," replied Zara, sha-

king her head; "for though he was certainly there all yesterday, he made his escape this morning."

Layton bit his lip, and his brow grew clouded. "That is unfortunate," he said, "most unfortunate! — I do not ask you how you know, Zara; but are you quite sure?"

"Perfectly," she answered — "I would not deceive you for the world, Layton; and I only say what I have said, because I think that, if you do search the wood, it may draw attention to your being in this neighbourhood, which as yet is not known at Harbourne, and it may embarrass us very much."

"I am not sure, Layton," said Sir Edward Digby, "that as far as your own purposes are concerned, it might not be better to seem, at all events, to withdraw the troops, or at least a part of them, from this neighbourhood. Indeed, though I have no right to give you advice upon the subject, I think also it might be beneficial in other respects, for as soon as the smugglers think you gone, they will act with more freedom."

"I propose to do so, to-morrow," replied the Colonel; "but I have some information already, and expect more, upon which I must act in the first place. It will be as well, however, to stop Irby's party, if there is no end to be obtained by their proceedings."

He then took leave of Zara and his friend, mounted his horse, and rode back to meet the troop that was advancing; while Zara and Sir Edward Digby, after following the same road up to the first houses of Woodchurch, turned away to the right, and went back to Harbourne, by the small country road which leads from Kenningdington to Tenterden.

Their conversation, as they went, would be of very little interest to the reader; for it consisted almost altogether of comments upon Layton's changed appearance, and discussions of the same questions of doubt and difficulty which had occupied them before. They went slowly, however; and when they reached the house it did not want much more than three quarters of an hour to the usual time of dinner. Sir Robert Croyland they found looking out of the glass-door, which commanded a view towards his brother's house, and his first question was, which way they had

returned. Sir Edward Digby gave an easy and unconcerned reply, describing the road they had followed, and comparing it, greatly to its disadvantage, with that which they had pursued on their former expedition.

"Then you saw nothing of the carriage, Zara?" inquired her father. "It is very strange that Edith has not come back."

"No, we saw no carriage of any kind; but a carrier's cart," replied the young lady. "Perhaps if Edith did not know you were going to send, she might not be ready."

This reason, however, did not seem to satisfy Sir Robert Croyland; and after talking with him for a few minutes more as he stood, still gazing forth over the country, Zara and Digby retired to change their dress before dinner; and the latter received a long report from his servant of facts which will be shown hereafter. The man was particularly minute and communicative, because his master asked him no questions, and suffered him to tell his tale his own way. But that tale fully occupied the time till the second bell rang, and Digby hurried down to dinner.

Still, Miss Croyland had not returned; and it was evident that Sir Robert Croyland was annoyed and uneasy. All the suavity and cheerfulness of the morning was gone; for one importunate source of care and thought will always carry the recollection back to others; and he sat at the dinner table in silence and gloom, only broken by brief intervals of conversation, which he carried on with a laborious effort.

Just as Mrs. Barbara rose to retire, however, the butler re-entered the room, announcing to Sir Robert Croyland that Mr. Radford had called, and wished to speak with him. "He would not come in, Sir," continued the man, "for he said he wanted to speak with you alone, so I showed him into the library."

Sir Robert Croyland instantly rose, but looked with a hesitating glance at his guest, while Mrs. Barbara and Zara retired from the room.

"Pray, do not let me detain you, Sir Robert," said the young officer; "I have taken as much wine as I ever do, and will go and join the ladies in the drawing-room."

The customs of the day required that the master of the house

should press the bottle upon his guest; and Sir Robert Croyland did not fail to do so. But Digby remained firm, and, to settle the question, walked quietly to the door and entered the drawing-room. There, he found Zara seated; but Mrs. Barbara was standing near the table, and apparently in a state, for which the English language supplies but one term, and that not a very classical one. I mean, she was in a *fidget*.

The reader is aware that the library of Harbourne House was adjacent to the drawing-room, and that there was a door between them. It was a thick, solid, oaken door, however, such as shut out the wind in the good old times; and, moreover, it fitted very close. Thus, though the minute after Sir Edward had entered the room, a low murmur, as of persons speaking somewhat loud, was heard from the library, not a single syllable could be distinguished; and Mrs. Barbara looked at the keyhole, with a longing indescribable. After about thirty seconds' martyrdom, Mrs. Barbara quitted the room: Zara, who knew her aunt, candidly trusting, that she had gone to put herself out of temptation; and Sir Edward Digby never for a moment imagining, that she could have been in any temptation at all. It may now be necessary, however, to follow Sir Robert Croyland to the library, and to reveal to the reader all that Mrs. Barbara was so anxious to learn.

He found Mr. Radford, booted and spurred, standing, with his tall, bony figure, in as easy an attitude as it could assume, by the fire-place; and the baronet's first question was, "In the name of Heaven, Radford, what has become of Edith? — Neither she nor the carriage have returned."

"Oh, yes, the carriage has, half an hour ago!" replied Mr. Radford; "and I met the horses going back as I came. — Didn't you get my message which I sent by the coachman?"

"No, I must have been at dinner," answered Sir Robert Croyland, "and the fools did not give it to me."

"Well, it is no great matter," rejoined Mr. Radford, in the quietest possible tone. "It was only to say that I was coming over, and would explain to you all about Miss Croyland."

"But where is she? Why did she not come?" demanded her father, with some of the old impetuosity of his youth.

"She is at my house," answered the other, deliberately; "I thought it would be a great deal better, Croyland, to bring her there at once, as you left to me the decision of where the marriage was to be. She could be quite as comfortable there as here. My son will be up to-morrow; and the marriage can take place quietly, without any piece of work. Now, here it would be difficult to manage it; for, in the first place, it would be dangerous for my son. You have got a stranger in the house, and a whole heap of servants, who cannot be trusted. I have arranged everything for the marriage, and for their going off quietly on their little tour. We shall soon get a pardon for this affair with the dragoons; and that will be all settled."

Sir Robert Croyland had remained mute; not with any calm or tranquil feelings, but with indignation and astonishment. "Upon my life and soul," he cried, "this is too bad! Do you mean to say, Sir, that you have ventured, without my knowledge or consent, to change my daughter's destination, and take her to your house when I wished her to be brought here?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Radford, with the most perfect calmness.

"Well then, Sir," exclaimed the baronet, irritated beyond all endurance — "I have to tell you, that you have committed a gross, insolent, and unjustifiable act; and I have to insist that she be brought back here this very night."

"Nay, my dear friend — nay," replied M. Radford, in a half jeering tone. "These are harsh words that you use; but you must hear me first, before I pay any attention to them."

"I want to hear nothing, Sir," cried Sir Robert Croyland, his anger still carrying him forward. "But if you do not send her back to her own home, I will get horses over from Tenterden, and bring her myself. — Her slavery has not yet commenced, Mr. Radford."

"I shall not be able to bring her over," answered Mr. Radford, still maintaining the same provoking coolness; "because, in case of her return, I should be obliged to use my horses myself, to lay certain important facts, which we both know of, before a brother magistrate."

He paused, and Sir Robert Croyland winced. But still indignation was uppermost for the time; and rapidly as lightning the thoughts of resistance passed through his mind. "This man's conduct is too bad," he said to himself. "After such a daring act as this, with his character blackened by so many stains, and so clear a case of revenge, the magistrates will surely hardly listen to him." But as he continued to reflect, timidity — the habitual timidity of many years — began to mingle with and dilute his resolution; and Mr. Radford, who knew him to the very heart, after having suffered him to reflect just long enough to shake his firmness, went on in a somewhat different tone, saying, "Come, Sir Robert! don't be unreasonable; and before you quarrel irretrievably with an old friend, listen quietly to what he has got to say."

"Well, Sir, well," said Sir Robert Croyland, casting himself into a chair — "what is it you have got to say?"

"Why, simply this, my dear friend," answered Mr. Radford, "that you are not aware of all the circumstances, and therefore cannot judge yet whether I have acted right or wrong. You and I have decided, I think, that there can no longer be any delay in the arrangement of our affairs. I put it plainly to you yesterday, that it was to be now or never; and you agreed that it should be now. You brought me your daughter's consent in the afternoon; and so far the matter was settled. I don't want to injure you; and if you are injured, it is your own fault —"

"But I gave no consent," said Sir Robert Croyland, "that she should be taken to your house. The circumstances — the circumstances, Mr. Radford!"

"Presently, presently," replied his companion. "I take it for granted, that, when you have pledged yourself to a thing, you are anxious to accomplish it. Now I tell you, there was no sure way of accomplishing this, but that which I have taken. Do you know who is the commander of this dragoon regiment which is down here? — No. But I do. Do you know who is the man, who, like a sub-officer of the Customs, attacked our friends yesterday morning, took some fifty of them prisoners, robbed me of some seventy thousand pounds, and is now hunting after my

son, as if he were a fox? — No. But I do; and I will tell you who he is. — One Harry Layton, whom you may have heard of — now, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Layton, Knight of the Bath, forsooth!”

Sir Robert Croyland gazed upon him in astonishment; but, whatever were his other sensations, deep grief and bitter regret mingled with them, when he thought that circumstances should ever have driven or tempted him to promise his daughter's hand to a low, dissolute, unprincipled villain, and to put a fatal barrier between her and one whom he had always known to be generous, honourable, and high principled, and who had now gained such distinction in the service of his country. He remained perfectly silent, however; and the expression of surprise and consternation which his countenance displayed, was misinterpreted by Mr. Radford to his own advantage.

“Now, look here, Sir Robert,” he continued; “if your daughter were in your house, you could not help this young man having some communication with her. He has already been over at your brother's, and has seen her, I doubt not. Here, then, is your fair daughter, Miss Zara, your guest Sir Edward Digby — his intimate friend, I dare say — all your maids and half your men servants, even dear Mrs. Barbara herself, with her sweet meddling ways, would all be ready to fetch and carry between the lovers. In short, our whole plans would be overturned; and I should be compelled to do that which would be very disagreeable to me, and to strike at this upstart Henry Layton through the breast of Sir Robert Croyland. In my house, he can have no access to her; and though some mischief may already have been done, yet it can go no further.”

“Now I understand what you mean by revenge,” said the baronet, in a low tone, folding his hands together. — “Now I understand.”

“Well, but have I judged rightly or wrongly?” demanded Mr. Radford.

“Rightly, I suppose,” said Sir Robert Croyland, sadly. “It can't be helped; — but poor Edith, how does she bear it?”

“Oh, very well,” answered Mr. Radford, quietly. “She

cried a little at first, and when she found where they were going, asked the coachman what he meant. It was my coachman, you know, not yours; and so he lied, like a good, honest fellow, and said you were waiting for her at my house. I was obliged to make up a little bit of a story too, and tell her you knew all about it; but that was no great harm; for I was resolved, you should know all about it, very soon."

"Lied like a good honest fellow!" murmured Sir Robert Croyland, to himself. "Well," he continued, aloud, "at all events I must come over to-morrow, and try to reconcile the poor girl to it."

"Do so, do so," answered Mr. Radford; "and in the meantime, I must be off; for I've still a good deal of work to do to-night. Did you see, they have withdrawn the dragoons from the wood? They knew it would be of no use to keep them there. So now, good night — that's all settled."

"All settled, indeed," murmured Sir Robert Croyland as Mr. Radford left him; and for nearly half an hour after, he continued sitting in the library, with his hands clasped upon his knee, exactly in the same position.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIR EDWARD DIGBY did not take advantage of the opportunity which Mrs. Barbara's absence afforded him. 'Tis may seem extraordinary conduct in a good soldier and quick and ready man; but he had his reasons for it. Not that he was beginning to hesitate, as some men do, when — after having quite made up their minds — they begin to consider all the perils of their situation, and retreat, without much regard for their own consistency, or the feelings of the other persons interested. But, no — Digby justly remembered that what he had to say might require some time, and that it might produce some agitation. Moreover, he recollected that there are few things so disagreeable on earth, as being interrupted at a time when people's eyes are sparkling or in tears, when the cheek is flushed or deadly pale; and as he knew not when Mrs. Barbara might return, and certainly did not anticipate that she would be long absent, he resolved to wait for another opportunity.

When he found minute after minute slip by, however, he began to repent of his determination; and certainly, although the word love never passed his lips, something very like the reality shone out in his eyes. Perhaps, had Zara been in any of her usual moods, more serious words might have followed. Had she been gay and jesting, or calm and thoughtful, a thousand little incidents might have led on naturally to the unfolding of the heart of each. But, on the contrary, she was neither the one nor the other. She was evidently anxious, apprehensive, ill at ease; and though she conversed rationally enough for a person whose mind was in such a state, yet she frequently turned her eyes towards the door of the adjoining room, from which the sound of her father's voice and that of Mr. Radford might still be heard.

Sir Edward Digby endeavoured to gain her attention to himself, as much with a view to withdraw it from unpleasant subjects as anything else; and it was very natural that — with one so fair and so excellent, one possessing so much brightness, in spite of a few little spots — it was natural that his tone should become tenderer every minute. At length, however, she stopped him, saying, "I am very anxious just now. I fear there is some mischief going on there, which we cannot prevent, and may never know. Edith's absence is certainly very strange; and I fear they may foil us yet."

In a minute or two after, Mrs. Barbara Croyland returned, but in such a flutter that she spoilt her embroidery, which she snatched up to cover her agitation, dropped her finest scissars, and broke the point off, and finally ran the needle into her finger, which, thereupon, spotted the silk with blood. She gave no explanation indeed of all this emotion, but looked several times at Zara with a meaning glance; and when, at length, Sir Robert Croyland entered the drawing-room, his whole air and manner did not tend to remove from his daughter's mind the apprehension which his sister's demeanour had cast over it.

There is a general tone in every landscape which it never entirely loses; yet how infinite are the varieties which sunshine and cloud and storm, and morning, evening, and noon, bring upon it; and thus with the expression and conduct of every man,

although they retain certain distinctive characteristics, yet innumerable are the varieties produced by the moods, the passions, and the emotions of the mind. Sir Robert Croyland was no longer irritably thoughtful; but he was stern, gloomy, melancholy. He strove to converse, indeed; but the effort was so apparent, the pain it gave him so evident, that Sir Edward Digby felt, or fancied, that his presence was a restraint. He had too much tact, however, to show that he imagined such to be the case; and he only resolved to retire to his own room as soon as he decently could. He was wrong in his supposition, indeed, that his host might wish to communicate something privately to Zara, or to Mrs. Barbara. Sir Robert had nothing to tell; and therefore the presence of Sir Edward Digby was rather agreeable to him than not, as shielding him from inquiries, which it might not have suited him to answer. He would have talked if he could, and would have done his best to make his house agreeable to his young guest; but his thoughts still turned, with all the bitterness of smothered anger, to the indignity he had suffered; and he asked himself, again and again, "Will the time ever come, when I shall have vengeance for all this?"

The evening passed gloomily, and in consequence slowly; and at length, when the clock showed that it still wanted a quarter to ten, Digby rose and bade the little party good night, saying that he was somewhat tired, and had letters to write.

"I shall go to bed too," said Sir Robert Croyland, ringing for his candle. But Digby quitted the room first; and Zara could not refrain from saying, in a low tone, as she took leave of her father for the night, and went out of the room with him, "There is nothing amiss with Edith, I trust, my dear father?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered Sir Robert Croyland, with as careless an air as he could assume. "Nothing at all, but that she does not come home to-night, and perhaps may not to-morrow."

Still unsatisfied, Zara sought her own room; and when her maid had half performed her usual functions for the night, she dismissed her, saying, that she would do the rest herself. When alone, however, Zara Croyland did not proceed to undress, but remained thinking over all the events of the day, with her head

resting on her hand, and her eyes cast down. The idea of Edith and her fate mingled with other images. The words that Digby had spoken, the increasing tenderness of his tone and manner, came back to memory, and made her heart flutter with sensations unknown till then. She felt alarmed at her own feelings; she knew not well what they were; but still she said to herself at every pause of thought — “It is all nonsense! — He will go away and forget me; and I shall forget him! These soldiers have always some tale of love for every woman’s ear. It is their habit — almost their nature.” Did she believe her own conclusions? Not entirely; but she tried to believe them; and that was enough for the present.

Some minutes after, however, when a light knock was heard at the door, she started almost as if some one had struck her; and Fancy, who is always drawing upon improbability, made her believe, for an instant, that it might be Digby. She said, “Come in,” however, with tolerable calmness; and the next instant, the figure of her aunt presented itself, with eagerness in her looks and importance in her whole air.

“My dear child!” she said, “I did not know whether your maid was gone; but I am very happy she is, for I have something to tell you of very great importance indeed. What do you think that rascal Radford has done?” and as she spoke, she sank, with a dignified air, into a chair.

“I really can’t tell, my dear aunt,” replied Zara, not a little surprised to hear the bad epithet which her aunt applied to a gentleman, towards whom she usually displayed great politeness. “I am sure he is quite capable of anything that is bad.”

“Ah, he is very much afraid of me, and what he calls my sweet meddling ways,” said the old lady; “but, perhaps, if I had meddled before, it might have been all the better. I am sure I am the very last to meddle, except when there is an absolute occasion for it, as you well know, my dear Zara.”

The last proposition was put in some degree as a question; but Zara did not think fit to answer it, merely saying, “What is it, my dear aunt? — I am all anxiety and fear regarding Edith.”

“Well you may be, my love,” said Mrs. Barbara; and there—

upon she proceeded to tell Zara, how she had overheard the whole conversation between Mr. Radford and her brother, through the door of the library, which opened into the little passage, that ran between it and the rooms beyond. She did not say that she had put her ear to the keyhole; but that Zara took for granted, and indeed felt somewhat like an accomplice, while listening to secrets which had been acquired by such means.

Thus almost everything that had passed in the library — with a few very short variations and improvements, but with a good deal of comment, and a somewhat lengthy detail — was communicated by Mrs. Barbara to her niece; and when she had done, the old lady added, “There, my dear, now go to bed and sleep upon it; and we will talk it all over in the morning, for I am determined that my niece shall not be treated in such a way by any vagabond smuggler like that. Dear me! one cannot tell what might happen, with Edith shut up in his house in that way. Talk of my meddling, indeed! He shall find that I will meddle now to some purpose! Good night, my dear love — good night!” But Mrs. Barbara stopped at the door, to explain to Zara that she had not told her before, “Because, you know,” said the good lady, “I could not speak of such things before a stranger, like Sir Edward Digby; and when he was gone, I didn’t dare say anything to your father. Think of it till to-morrow, there’s a dear girl, and try and devise some plan.”

“I will,” said Zara — “I will;” but as soon as her aunt had disappeared, she clasped her hands together, exclaiming, “Good Heaven! what plan can I form? Edith is lost! They have her now completely in their power. Oh, that I had known this before Sir Edward Digby went to sleep. He might have gone over to Layton to-morrow, early; and they might have devised something together. Perhaps he has not gone to rest yet. He told me to throw off all restraint, to have no ceremony in case of need. Layton told me so, too — that I might trust in him — that he is a man of honour. Oh, yes, I am sure he is a man of honour! but what will he think? — He promised he would think no harm of anything I might be called upon to do; and I promised I would trust him. I will go! He can speak to me in the passage. No one

sleeps near, to overhear. But I will knock softly; for though he said he had letters to write, he may have gone to bed by this time."

Leaving the lights standing where they were, Zara cast on a long dressing-gown, and crept quietly out into the passage, taking care not to pull the door quite to. All was silent in the house; not a sound was heard; and with her heart beating as if it would have burst through her side, she approached Sir Edward Digby's door; — but there she paused. Had she not paused, but gone on at once, and knocked, all would have been well; for, so far from being in bed, he was sitting calmly reading. But ladies' resolutions, and men's, are made of very much the same materials. The instant her foot stopped, her whole host of woman's feelings crowded upon her, and barred the way. First, she thought of modesty, and propriety, and decency; and then, though she might have overcome the whole of that squadron for Edith's sake, the remembrance of many words that Digby had spoken, the look, the tone, the manner, all rose again upon her memory. She felt that he was a lover; and putting her hand to her brow, she murmured — "I cannot; no, I cannot. Had he been only a friend, I would. — I will see him early to-morrow. I will sit up all night, that I may not sleep, and miss the opportunity; but I cannot go to-night;" and, returning as quietly to her own chamber as she had come thence, she shut the door and locked it. She had never locked it in her life before; and she knew not why she did it.

Then, drawing the arm-chair to the hearth, Zara Croyland trimmed the fire, wrapped herself up as warmly as she could; and putting out one of the candles, that she might not be left in darkness by both being burnt out together, she took up a book, and began to read. From time to time, during that long night, her eyes grew heavy, and she fell asleep; but something always woke her. Either her own thoughts troubled her in dreams, or else the book fell out of her hand, or the wind shook the window, or the cold chill that precedes the coming morning disturbed her; and at length she looked at her watch, and, finding it past five o'clock, she congratulated herself at having escaped the power of

the drowsy god, and, dressing in haste, undrew the curtains, and looked out by the light of the dawning day. When she saw the edge of the sun coming up, she said to herself, "He is often very early. I will go down." But, bethinking herself that no time was to be lost, she hurried first to her maid's room, and waking her, told her to see Sir Edward Digby's servant, as soon as he rose, and to bid him inform his master that she wanted to speak with him in the library. "Speak not a word of this to any one else, Eliza," she said; and then, thinking it necessary to assign some reason for her conduct, she added, "I am very anxious about my sister; her not coming home yesterday alarms me, and I want to hear more."

"Oh dear! you needn't frighten yourself, Miss Zara," replied the maid — "I dare say there's nothing the matter."

"But I cannot help frightening myself," replied Zara; and going down into the library, she unclosed one of the shutters.

The maid was very willing to gratify her young lady, for Zara was a favourite with all; but thinking from the look of the sky, that it would be a long time before the servant rose, and having no such scruples as her mistress, she went quietly away to his room, and knocked at his door, saying, "I wish you would get up, Mr. Somers — I want to speak with you."

Zara remained alone for twenty minutes in the library, or not much more, and then she heard Digby's step in the passage. There was a good deal of alarm and surprise in his look when he entered; but his fair companion's tale was soon told; and that sufficiently explained her sudden call for his presence. He made no comment at the moment, but replied, "Wait for me here one instant. I will order my horse, and be back directly."

He was speedily by her side again; and then, taking her hand in his, he said, "I wish I had known this, last night. — You need not have been afraid of disturbing me, for I was up till nearly one."

Zara smiled: "You do not know," she answered, "how near I was to your door, with the intention of calling you."

"And why did you not?" asked Digby, eagerly. "Nay, you must tell me, why you should hesitate when so much was at stake."

"I can but answer, because my heart failed me," replied Zara. "You know women's hearts are weak foolish things."

"Nay," said Digby, "you must explain further. — Why did your heart fail you? Tell me, Zara. I cannot rest satisfied unless you tell me."

"Indeed, there is no time now for explanation," she replied, feeling that her admission had drawn her into more than she had anticipated; "your horse will soon be here — and — and there is not a moment to lose."

"There is time enough for those who will," answered Digby, in a serious tone; "you promised me that you would not hesitate, whenever necessity required you to apply to me for counsel or aid — you have hesitated, Zara. Could you doubt me — could you be apprehensive — could you suppose that Edward Digby would, in word, deed, or thought, take advantage of your generous confidence?"

"No, no — oh, no!" answered Zara, warmly, blushing, and trembling at the same time, "I did not — I could not, after all you have done — after all I have seen. No, no; I thought you would think it strange — I thought —"

"Then you supposed I would wrong you in thought!" he replied, with some mortification in his manner; "you do not know me yet."

"Oh yes, indeed I do," she answered, feeling that she was getting further and further into difficulties; and then she added, with one of her sudden bursts of frankness, "I will tell you how it was — candidly and truly. Just as I was at your door, and about to knock, the memory of several things you had said — inadvertently, perhaps — crossed my mind; and, though I felt that I could go at any hour to consult a friend in such terrible circumstances, I could not — no, I could not do so with a — with one — You see what harm you have done by such fine speeches!"

She thought, that by her last words, she had guarded herself securely from any immediate consequences of this unreserved confession; but she was mistaken. She merely hurried on what might yet have rested for a day or two.

Sir Edward Digby took her other hand also, and held it gently yet firmly, as if he was afraid she should escape from him. "Zara," he said, "dear Zara, I have done harm, by speaking too much, or not enough. I must remedy it by the only means in my power. — Listen to me for one moment, for I cannot go till all is said. You must cast off this reserve — you must act perfectly freely with me; I seek to bind you by no engagement — I will bear my doubt; I will not construe anything you do, as an acceptance of my suit; but you must know — nay, you do know, you do feel, that I am your lover. It was doubt of your own sensations towards me, that made you hesitate — it was fear that you should commit yourself, to that which you might, on consideration, be indisposed to ratify. — You thought that I might plead such confidence as a tacit promise; and that made you pause. But hear me, as I pledge myself — upon my honour, as a gentleman — that if you act fearlessly and freely, in the cause in which we are both engaged — if you confide in me — trust in me, and never hesitate to put yourself, as you may think, entirely in my power, I will never look upon anything as plighting you to me in the slightest degree, till I hear you say the words, 'Digby, I am yours' — if ever that happy day should come. In the meantime, however, to set you entirely free from all apprehension of what others may say, I hold myself bound to you by every promise that man can make; and this very day I will ask your father's approbation of my suit. But I am well aware, though circumstances have shown me in a marvellous short time, that your heart and mind is equal to your beauty, yet it is not to be expected that such a being can be won in a few short days, and that I must wait in patience — not without hope, indeed, but with no presumption. By your conduct, at least, I shall know, whether I have gained your esteem. — Your love, perhaps, may follow; and now I leave you, to serve your sister and my friend, to the best of my power."

Thus saying, he raised her hand to his lips, kissed it, and moved towards the door.

There was a sad struggle in Zara's breast; but as he was laying his hand upon the lock to open it, she said, "Digby — Digby — Edward!"

He instantly turned, and ran towards her; for her face had become very pale. She gave him her hand at once, however, "Kind, generous man!" she said, "you must not go without hearing my answer. Such a pledge cannot be all on one part. I am yours, Digby, if you wish it; yet know me better first before you answer — see all my faults, and all my failings. Even this must show you how strange a being I am — how unlike other girls — how unlike perhaps, the woman you would wish to call your wife!"

"Wish it!" answered Digby, casting his arm round her, "from my heart — from my very soul, Zara. I know enough, I have seen enough, for I have seen you in circumstances that bring forth the bosom's inmost feelings; and though you are unlike others — and I have watched many in their course — that very dissimilarity is to me the surpassing charm. They are all art, you are all nature — ay, and nature in its sweetest and most graceful form; and I can boldly say, I never yet saw woman whom I should desire to call my wife till I saw you. I will not wait, dear girl; but, pledged to you as you are pledged to me, will not press this subject further on you, till your sister's fate is sealed. I must, indeed, speak with your father at once, that there may be no mistake, no misapprehension; but till all this sad business is settled, we are brother and sister, Zara; and then a dearer bond."

"Oh, yes, yes — brother and sister!" cried Zara, clinging to him at a name which takes fear from woman's heart, "so will we be, Edward; and now all my doubts and hesitations will be at an end. I shall never fear more to seek you when it is needful."

"And my suit will be an excuse and a reason to all others, for free interviews, and solitary rambles, and private conference, and every dear communion," answered Digby, pleased, and yet almost amazed at the simplicity with which she lent herself to the magic of a word, when the heart led her.

But Zara saw he was a little extending the brother's privilege; and with a warm cheek but smiling lip, she answered, "There, leave me now; I see you are learned in the art of leading on from step to step. Go on your way, Edward; and, oh! be kind to

me, and do not make me feel this new situation too deeply at first. There, pray take away your arm; none but a father's or a sister's has been there before; and it makes my heart beat, as if it were wrong."

But Digby kept it where it was for a moment or two longer, and gave a few instants to happiness, in which she shared, though it agitated her. "Nay, go," she said, at length, in a tone of entreaty, "and I will lie down and rest for an hour; for I have sat up all night by the fire, lest I should be too late. — You must go, indeed. There is your horse upon the terrace; and we must not be selfish, but remember poor Edith before we think of our own happiness."

There was a sweet and frank confession in her words that pleased Digby well; and leaving her with a heart at rest on his own account, he mounted his horse and rode rapidly away towards the quarters of Sir Henry Layton.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE reader has doubtless remarked — for every reader who peruses a book to any purpose must remark everything, inasmuch as the most important events are so often connected with insignificant circumstances, that the one cannot be understood without the other — the reader has doubtless remarked, that Mr. Radford, on leaving Sir Robert Croyland, informed his unhappy victim, that he had still a good deal of business to do that night. Now, during the day he had — as may well be judged from his own statement of all the preparations he had already made — done a great deal of very important business; but the details of his past proceedings I shall not enter into, and only beg leave to precede him by a short time, to the scene of those farther operations which he had laid out as the close of that evening's labours. It is to the lone house, as it was called, near Iden Green, that I wish to conduct my companions, and a solitary and gloomy looking spot it was, at the time I speak of. All that part of the country is now very thickly inhabited: the ground bears nearly as large a population as it can support; and though there are still fields, and

woods, and occasional waste places, yet no such events could now happen as those which occurred eighty or a hundred years ago, when one might travel miles, in various parts of Kent, without meeting a living soul. The pressure of a large population crushes out the bolder and more daring sorts of crime, and leaves small cunning to effect, in secret, what cannot be accomplished openly, under the police of innumerable eyes.

But it was not so in those days; and the lone house near Iden Green, whatever it was originally built for, had become the refuge and the lurking-place of some of the most fierce and lawless men in the country. It was a large building, with numerous rooms and passages; and it had stables behind it, but no walled courtyard; for the close sweeping round of the wood, a part of which still exists in great beauty, was a convenience on which its architect seemed to have calculated. Standing some way off the high road, and about half a mile from Collyer Green, it was so sheltered by trees that, on whichever side approached, nothing could be seen but the top of the roof and part of a garret-window, till one was within a short distance of the edifice. But that garret-window had its advantages; for it commanded a view over a great part of the country, on three sides, and especially gave a prospect of the roads in the neighbourhood.

The building was not a farm-house, for it had none of the requisites; it could not well be a public-house, though a sign swung before it; for the lower windows were boarded up, and the owner or tenant thereof, if any traveller whom he did not know, stopped at his door — which was, indeed, a rare occurrence — told him that it was all a mistake, and cursing the sign, vowed he would have it cut down. Nevertheless, if the Ramleys, or any of their gang, or, indeed, any members of a similar fraternity, came thither, the doors opened as if by magic; and good accommodation for man and horse was sure to be found within.

It was also remarked, that many a gentleman in haste went in there, and was never seen to issue forth again till he appeared in quite a different part of the country; and, had the master of the house lived two or three centuries earlier, he might on that very account have risked the fagot, on a charge of dealing with the devil.

As it was, he was only suspected of being a coiner; but in regard to that charge, history has left no evidence, pro or con.

It was in this house, however, on the evening of the day subsequent to the discomfiture of the smugglers, that six men were assembled in a small room at the back, all of whom had, more or less, taken part in the struggle near Woodchurch. The two younger Ramleys were there, as well as one of the principal members of their gang, and two other men, who had been long engaged in carrying smuggled goods from the coast, as a regular profession; but who were, in other respects, much more respectable persons than those by whom they were surrounded. At the head of the table, however, was the most important personage of the whole: no other than Richard Radford himself, who had joined his comrades an hour or two before. The joy and excitement of his escape from the wood, the temporary triumph which he had obtained over the vigilance of the soldiery, and the effect produced upon a disposition naturally bold, reckless, and daring, by the sudden change from imminent peril to comparative security, had all raised his spirits to an excessive pitch; and, indeed, the whole party, instead of seeming depressed by their late disaster, appeared elevated with that wild and lawless mirth, which owns no tie or restraint, reverences nothing sacred or respectable. Spirits and water were circulating freely amongst them; and they were boasting of their feats in the late skirmish, or commenting upon its events, with many a jest and many a falsehood.

"The Major did very well, too," said Ned Ramley, "for he killed one of the dragoons, and wounded another, before he went down himself, poor devil!"

"Here's to the Major's ghost!" cried young Radford, "and I'll try to give it satisfaction by avenging him. We'll have vengeance upon them yet, Ned."

"Ay, upon all who had any concern in it," answered Jim Ramley, with a meaning look.

"And first upon him who betrayed us," rejoined Richard Radford; "and I will have it, too, in a way that shall punish him more than if we flogged him to death with horse-whips, as the Sussex men did to Chater at the Flying Bull, near Hazlemere."

The elder of the two Ramleys gave a look towards the men who were at the bottom of the table; and Richard Radford, dropping his voice, whispered something to Ned Ramley, who replied aloud, with an oath, "I'd have taken my revenge, whatever came of it."

"No, no," answered Radford, "the red-coats were too near. However, all's not lost that's delayed. I wonder where that young devil, little Starlight's gone to. I sent him three hours ago to Cranbrook with the clothes, and told him to come back and tell me if she passed. She'll not go now, that's certain; for she would be in the dark. Have you any notion, Ned, how many men we could get together in case of need?"

"Oh, fifty or sixty!" said one of the men from the bottom of the table, who seemed inclined to have his share in the conversation, as soon as it turned upon subjects with which he was familiar; "there are seven or eight hid away down at Cranbrook, and nine or ten at Tenterden, with some of the goods, too."

"Ah, that's well!" answered young Radford; "I thought all the goods had been taken."

"Oh, dear no," replied Jim Ramley, "we've got a thousand pounds' worth in this house, and I dare say double as much is scattered about in different hides. The light things were got off; but they are the most valuable."

"I'll tell you what, my men," cried young Radford, "as soon as these soldiers are gone down to the coast again, we'll all gather together, and do some devilish high thing, just to show them that they are not quite masters of the country yet. I've a great mind to burn their inn at Woodchurch, just for harbouring them. If we don't make these rascally fellows fear us, the trade will be quite put down in the county."

"I swear," exclaimed Ned Ramley, with a horrible blasphemy, "that if I can catch any one who has peached, even if it be but by one word, I will split his head like a lobster."

"And I, too!" answered his brother; and several others joined in the oath.

The conversation then took another turn; and while it went on generally around the table, young Radford spoke several times in a low voice to the two who sat next to him, and the name of Hard-

ing was more than once mentioned. The glass circulated very freely also; and although none of them became absolutely intoxicated, yet all of them were more or less affected by the spirits, when the boy, whom we have called Little Starlight, crept quietly into the room, and approached Mr. Radford.

"She's not come, Sir," he said; "I waited a long while, and then went and asked the old woman of the shop, telling her that I was to be sure and see that Kate Clare got the bundle; but she said that she certainly wouldn't come to-night."

"That's a good boy," said young Radford. "Go and tell the people to bring us some candles; and then I'll give you a glass of Hollands for your pains. It's getting infernally dark," he continued, "and as nothing more is to be done to-day, we may as well make a night of it."

"No, no," answered one of the men at the bottom of the table, "I've had enough, and I shall go and turn in."

Nobody opposed him; and he and his companion soon after left them. A smile passed round amongst the rest as soon as the two had shut the door.

"Now those puny fellows are gone," said Jim Ramley, "we can say what we like. First, let us talk about the goods, Mr. Radford, for I don't think they are quite safe here. They had better be got up to your father's as soon as possible, for if the house were to be searched, we could get out into the wood, but they could not."

"Hark!" said young Radford; "there's some one knocking hard at the house door, I think."

"Ay, trust all that to Obadiah," said Ned Ramley. "He won't open the door till he sees who it is."

The minute after, however, old Mr. Radford stood amongst them; and he took especial care not to throw any damp upon their spirits, but rather to encourage them, and make light of the late events. He sat down for a few minutes by his son, took a glass of Hollands and water, and then whispered to his hopeful heir that he wanted to speak with him for a minute. The young man instantly rose, and led the way out into the room opposite, which was vacant.

"By Heaven, Dick, this is an awkward job!" said his father; "the loss is enormous, and never to be recovered."

"The things are not all lost," answered Richard Radford. "A great quantity of the goods are about the country. There's a thousand pounds' worth, they say, in this house."

"We must have them got together as fast as possible," said Mr. Radford, "and brought up to our place. All that is here had better be sent up about three o'clock in the morning."

"I'll bring them up myself," replied his son.

"No, no, no!" said Mr. Radford; "you keep quiet where you are, till to-morrow night."

"Pooh, nonsense," answered the young man; "I'm not at all afraid. — Very well — very well, they shall come up, and I'll follow to-morrow night, if you think I can be at the Hall in safety."

"I don't intend you to be long at the Hall," answered Mr. Radford: "you must take a trip over the sea, my boy, till we can make sure of a pardon for you. There! you need not look so blank. You shan't go alone. Come up at eleven o'clock; and you will find Edith Croyland waiting to give you her hand, the next day. — Then a post-chaise and four, and a good tight boat on the beach, and you are landed in France in no time. Everything is ready — everything is settled; and with her fortune, you will have enough to live like a prince, till you can come back here."

All this intelligence did not seem to give Richard Radford as much satisfaction as his father expected. "I would rather have had little Zara, a devilish deal!" he replied.

"Very likely," answered his father, with his countenance changing, and his brow growing dark; "but that won't do, Dick. We have had enough nonsense of all sorts; and it must now be brought to an end. It's not the matter of the fortune alone; but I am determined that both you and I shall have revenge."

"Revenge!" said his son; "I don't see what revenge has to do with that."

"I'll tell you," answered old Mr. Radford, in a low tone, but bitter in its very lowness. "The man who so cunningly surrounded

you and the rest yesterday morning, who took all my goods, and murdered many of our friends, is that very Harry Layton, whom you've heard talk of. He has come down here on purpose to ruin you and me, if possible, and to marry Edith Croyland; but he shall never have her, by —," and he added a fearful oath which I will not repeat.

"Ay, that alters the case," replied Richard Radford, with a demoniacal smile; "oh, I'll marry her and make her happy, as the people say. But I'll tell you what — I'll have my revenge, too, before I go, and upon one who is worse than the other fellow — I mean the man who betrayed us all."

"Who is that?" demanded the father.

"Harding," answered young Radford — "Harding."

"Are you sure that it was he?" asked the old gentleman; "I have suspected him myself, but I have no proof."

"But I have," replied his son: "he was seen several nights before, by little Starlight, talking for a long while with this very Colonel of Dragoons, upon the cliff. Another man was with him, too — most likely Mowle; and then, again, yesterday evening, some of these good fellows who were on the look-out to help me, saw him speaking to a dragoon officer at Widow Clare's door; so he must be a traitor, or they would have taken him."

"Then he deserves to be shot," said old Radford, fiercely; "but take care, Dick: you had better not do it yourself. You'll find him difficult to get at, and may be caught."

"Leave him to me — leave him to me," answered his hopeful son; "I've a plan in my head that will punish him better than a bullet. But the bullet he shall have, too; for all the men have sworn that they will take his blood; but that can be done after I'm gone."

"But what's your plan, my boy?" asked old Mr. Radford.

"Never mind, never mind!" answered Richard, "I'll find means to execute it. — I only wish those dragoons were away from Harbourne Wood."

"Why, they are," exclaimed his father, laughing. "They were withdrawn this afternoon, and a party of them, too, marched out of Woodchurch, as if they were going to Ashford. I dare

say, by this time to-morrow night, they will be all gone to their quarters again."

"Then it's all safe!" said his son; and after some more conversation between the two — and various injunctions upon the part of the old man, as to caution and prudence, upon the part of the young one, they parted for the time. Young Radford then rejoined his companions, and remained with them till about one o'clock in the morning, when the small portion of smuggled goods which had been saved, was sent off, escorted by two men, towards Radford Hall, where they arrived safely, and were received by servants well accustomed to such practices. They consisted of only one horse-load, indeed, so that the journey was quickly performed; and the two men returned before five. Although Richard Radford had given his father every assurance that he would remain quiet, and take every prudent step for his own concealment, his very first acts showed no disposition to keep his word. Before eight o'clock in the morning, he, the two Ramleys, and one or two other men, who had come in during the night, were out amongst the fields and woods, "reconnoitring," as they called it; but, with a spirit in their breasts, which rendered them ready for any rash and criminal act that might suggest itself. Thus occupied, I shall for the present leave them, and show more of their proceedings at a future period.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HAVING now led the history of a great part of the personages in our drama up to the same point of time, namely, the third morning after the defeat of the smugglers, we may as well turn to follow out the course of Sir Edward Digby, on a day that was destined to be eventful to all the parties concerned. On arriving at Woodchurch, he found a small body of dragoons, ready mounted, at the door of the little inn, and two saddled horses, held waiting for their riders. Without ceremony, he entered, and went up at once to Layton's room, where he found him, booted and spurred to set out, with Mowle the officer standing by him, looking on,

while Sir Henry placed some papers in a writing-desk, and locked them up.

The young commander greeted his friend warmly; and then, turning to the officer of Customs, said, "If you will mount, Mr. Mowle, I will be down with you directly;" and as soon as Mowle, taking the hint, departed, he continued, in a quick tone, but with a faint smile upon his countenance, "I know your errand, Digby, before you tell it. Edith has been transferred to the good charge and guidance of Mr. Radford; but that has only prepared me to act more vigorously than ever. My scruples on Sir Robert Croyland's account are at an end. — Heaven and earth! Is it possible that a man can be so criminally weak, as to give his child up — a sweet, gentle girl like that — to the charge of such a base unprincipled scoundrel!"

"Nay, nay, we must do Sir Robert justice," answered Digby. "It was done without his consent — indeed, against his will; and, a more impudent and shameless piece of trickery was never practised. You must listen for one moment, Layton, though you seem in haste;" and he proceeded to detail to him, as succinctly as possible, all that had occurred between Mr. Radford and Edith's father on the preceding evening, stating his authority, and whence Zara had received her information.

"That somewhat alters the case, indeed;" answered Layton; "but it must not alter my conduct. I am, indeed, in haste, Digby, for I hope, ere two or three hours are over, to send the young scoundrel, for whose sake all this is done, a prisoner to the gaol. Mowle has somehow got information of where he is — from undoubted authority, he says; and we are away to Iden Green, in consequence. We shall get more information by the way; and I go with the party for a certain distance, in order to be at hand, in case of need; but, as it does not do for me, in my position, to take upon me the capture of half-a-dozen smugglers, the command of the party will rest with Cornet Joyce. We will deal with Mr. Radford, the father, afterwards. But, in the meantime, Digby, as your information certainly gives a different view of the case, from that which I had before taken, you will greatly oblige me if you can contrive to ride over to Mr. Croyland's, and

see if you can find Mr. Warde there. Beg him to let me have the directions he promised, by four o'clock to-day; and if you do not find him, leave word to that effect, with Mr. Croyland himself."

"You seem to place great faith in Warde," said Sir Edward Digby, shaking his head.

"I have cause — I have cause, Digby," answered his friend. "But I must go, lest this youth escape me again."

"Well, God speed you, then," replied Digby. "I will go to Mr. Croyland at once, and can contrive, I dare say, to get back to Harbourn by breakfast time. It is not above two or three miles round, and I will go twenty, at any time, to serve you, Layton."

Sir Edward Digby found good Mr. Zachary Croyland walking about in his garden, in a state of irritation indescribable. He, also, was aware, by this time, of what had befallen his niece; and such was his indignation, that he could scarcely find it in his heart to be even commonly civil to any one. On Sir Edward Digby delivering his message, as he found that Mr. Warde was not there, the old gentleman burst forth, exclaiming, "What have I to do with Warde, Sir, or your friend either, Sir? — Your friend's a fool! He might have walked out of that door with Edith Croyland in his hand; and that's no light prize, let me tell you; but he chose to be delicate, and gentlemanly, and all that sort of stupidity, and you see what has come of it. And now, forsooth, he sends over to ask advice and directions from Warde. Well, I will tell the man, if I see him — though Heaven only knows whether that will be the case or not."

"Sir Henry Layton seems to place great confidence in Mr. Warde," replied Digby, "which I trust may be justified."

Mr. Croyland looked at him sharply, for a moment, from under his cocked hat, and then exclaimed, "Pish! you are a fool, young man. — There, don't look so fierce. I've given over fighting for these twenty years; and, besides — you wouldn't come to the duello with little Zara's uncle, would you? Ha, ha, ha! — Ha, ha, ha! — Ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed immoderately, but splenetically enough at the same time. "But I ought to have put my meaning as a question, not as a proposition," he continued.

“Are you such a fool as not to know the difference between an odd man and a madman, an eccentric man and a lunatic? If so, you had better get away as fast as possible; for you and I are likely soon to fall out. I understand what you mean about Warde, quite well; but I can tell you, that if you think Warde mad, I’m quite as mad as he is, only that his oddities lie all on the side of goodness and philanthropy, and mine now and then take a different course. But get you gone — get you gone; you are better than the rest of them, I believe. I do hope and trust you’ll marry Zara; and then you’ll plague each other’s souls, to my heart’s content.”

He held his hand out as he spoke; and Digby shook it, laughing good-humouredly; but, ere he had taken ten steps towards the door of the house, through which he had to pass before he could mount his horse, Mr. Croyland called after him, “Digby, Digby! — Sir Edward! — Eldest son! I say, — how could you be such a fool as not to run that fellow through the stomach when you had him at your feet? You see what a quantity of mischief has come of it. You are all fools together, you soldiers, I think; — but it’s true, a fool does as well as anything else to be shot at. — How’s your shoulder? Better, I suppose.”

“I have not thought of it for the last two days,” replied Digby.

“Well, that will do,” said Mr. Croyland. “Cured by the first intention. There, you may go: I don’t want you. Only, pray tell my brother, that I think him as great a rascal as old Radford. — He’ll know how much that means. — One’s a weak rascal, and the other’s a strong one; that’s the only difference between them; and Robert may fit on which cap he likes best.”

Digby did not think it necessary to stop to justify Sir Robert Croyland in his brother’s opinion; but, mounting his horse, he rode back across the country towards Harbourne as fast as he could go. He reached the house before the usual breakfast hour; but he found that everybody there had been an early riser as well as himself; the table was laid ready for breakfast; and Sir Robert Croyland was waiting in the drawing-room with some impatience in his looks.

"I think I am not too late, Sir Robert," said Digby, taking out his watch, and bowing with a smile to Zara and Mrs. Barbara.

"No, oh dear, no, my young friend," replied the baronet; "only in such a house as this, breakfast is going on all the morning long; and I thought you would excuse me, if I took mine a little earlier than usual, as I have got some way to go this morning."

This was said as they were entering the breakfast-room; but Sir Edward Digby replied, promptly, "I must ask you to spare me five minutes before you go, Sir Robert, as I wish to speak with you for a short time."

His host looked uneasy; for he was in that nervous and agitated state of mind, in which anything that is not clear and distinct seems terrible to the imagination, from the consciousness that many ill-defined calamities are hanging over us. He said, "Certainly, certainly!" however, in a polite tone; but he swallowed his breakfast in haste; and the young officer perceived that his host looked at every mouthful he took, as if likely to procrastinate the meal. Zara's face, too, was anxious and thoughtful; and consequently he hurried his own breakfast as fast as possible, knowing that the signal to rise would be a relief to all parties.

"If you will come into my little room, Sir Edward," said the master of the house, as soon as he saw that his guest was ready, "I shall be very happy to hear what you have to say."

Sir Edward Digby followed in silence; and, to tell the truth, his heart beat a good deal, though it was not one to yield upon slight occasions.

"I will not detain you a moment, Sir Robert," he said, when they had entered, and the door was shut, "for what I have to say will be easily answered. I am sensible, that yesterday my attention to your youngest daughter must have been remarked by you, and, indeed, my manner altogether must have shown you, and herself also, that I feel differently towards her and other women. I do not think it would be right to continue such conduct for one moment longer, without your approbation of my suit; and I can only further say, that if you grant me your sanction, I feel that I can love her deeply and well, that I will try to make her happy to

the best of my power, and that my fortune is amply sufficient to maintain her in the station of life in which she has always moved, and to make such a settlement upon her as I trust will be satisfactory to you. I will not detain you to expatiate upon my feelings; but such is a soldier's straightforward declaration, and I trust you will countenance and approve of my addressing her."

Sir Robert Croyland shook him warmly by the hand. "My dear Sir Edward," he said, "you are your father's own son — frank, candid, and honourable. He was one of the most gentlemanly and amiable men I ever knew; and it will give me heartfelt pleasure to see my dear child united to his son. But — indeed, I must deal with you as candidly —" He hesitated for a moment or two, and then went on — "Perhaps you think that circumstances here are more favourable than they really are. Things may come to your knowledge — things may have to be related — Zara's fortune will be —"

Sir Edward Digby saw that Sir Robert Croyland was greatly embarrassed; and for an instant — for love is a very irritable sort of state, at least for the imagination, and he was getting over head and ears in love, notwithstanding all his good resolutions — for an instant, I say, he might think that Zara had been engaged before, and that Sir Robert was about to tell him, that it was not the ever-coveted, first freshness of the heart he was to possess in her love, even if it were gained entirely. But a moment's thought, in regard to her father's situation, together with the baronet's last words, dispelled that unpleasant vision, and he replied, eagerly, "Oh, my dear Sir, that can make no difference in my estimation. If I can obtain her full and entire love, no external circumstance whatsoever can at all affect my views. — I only desire her hand."

"No external circumstances whatsoever!" said Sir Robert Croyland, pausing on the words. "Are you sure of your own firmness, Sir Edward Digby? If her father were to tell you he is a ruined man — if he had many circumstances to relate which might make it painful to you to connect yourself with him — I do not say that it is so; but if it were?"

"Rather an awkward position!" thought Sir Edward Digby; but his mind was fully made up; and he replied, without hesita-

tion, "It would still make no difference in my eyes, Sir Robert. I trust that none of these terrible things are the case, for your sake; but I should despise myself, if, with enough of my own, I made fortune any ingredient in my considerations, or if I could suffer my love for a being perfectly amiable in herself, to be affected by the circumstances of her family."

Sir Robert Croyland wrung his hand hard; and Digby felt that it was a sort of compact between them. "I fear I must go," said Zara's father, "and therefore I cannot explain more; but it is absolutely necessary to tell you that all my unmortgaged property is entailed, and will go to my brother, that Edith's fortune is totally independent, and that Zara has but a tithe of what her sister has."

"Still I say, as I said before," replied Digby, "that nothing of that kind can make any difference to me; nor will I ever suffer any consideration, not affecting your daughter personally — and I beg this may be clearly understood — to make any change in my views. If I can win her love — her entire, full, hearty love — with your sanction, she is mine. Have I that sanction, Sir Robert?"

"Fully, and from my heart," replied Sir Robert Croyland, with the unwonted tears coursing over his cheeks. "Go to her, my dear friend — go to her, and make what progress you may, with my best wishes. This is indeed a great happiness — a great relief!"

Thus saying, he followed Sir Edward Digby out of the room; and, mounting a new horse which had been brought up from his bailiff's, he rode slowly and thoughtfully away. As he went, a faint hope — nay, it could hardly be called a hope — a vague, wild fancy of explaining his whole situation to Sir Edward Digby, and gaining the blessed relief of confidence and counsel, arose in Sir Robert Croyland's breast.

Alas! what an unhappy state has been brought about by the long accumulation of sin and deceit which has gathered over human society! that no man can trust another fully! that we dare not confide our inmost thoughts to any! that there should be a fear — the necessity for a fear — of showing the unguarded heart

to the near and dear! that every man should — according to the most accursed axiom of a corrupt world — live with his friend as if he were one day to be his enemy. Oh, truth, and honour, and sincerity! oh, true Christianity! whither are ye gone? Timidity soon banished such thoughts from the breast of Sir Robert Croyland, though there was something in the whole demeanour of his daughter's lover which showed him that, if ever man was to be trusted, he might trust there; and had he known how deeply Digby was already acquainted with much that concerned him, he might perhaps have gone one step farther, and told him all. As it was, he rode on, and soon gave himself up to bitter thoughts again.

In the meantime, Sir Edward Digby returned to Zara and Mrs. Barbara in the drawing-room, with so well satisfied a look, that it was evident to both, his conversation with Sir Robert had not referred to any unpleasant subject, and had not had any unpleasant result. He excited the elder lady's surprise, however, and produced some slight agitation in the younger, by taking Zara by the hand, and in good set terms of almost formal courtesy, requesting a few minute's private audience. Her varying colour, and her hesitating look, showed her lover that she apprehended something more unpleasant than he had to say; and he whispered, as they went along towards the library, "It is nothing — it is nothing but to tell you what I have done, and to arrange our plan of campaign."

Zara looked up in his face with a glad smile, as if his words took some terror from her heart; and as soon as he was in the room, he let go her hand, and turned the key in such a manner in the door, that the key-hole could not serve the purpose of a perspective glass, even if it might that of an ear-trumpet.

"Forgive me, dear Zara," he said, "if I take care to secure our defences; otherwise, as your good aunt is perfectly certain that I am about to fall on my knees, and make my declaration, she might be seized with a desire to witness the scene, not at all aware that it has been performed already. But not to say more," he continued, "on a subject on which you have kindly and frankly set a lover's heart at rest, let me only tell you that your father has

fully sanctioned my suit, which I know, after what you have said, will not be painful to you to hear."

"I was sure he would," answered Zara; "not that he entered into any of my aunt's castles in the air, or that he devised my schemes, Digby; but, doubtless, he wishes to see a fortuneless girl well married, and would have been content with a lover for her, who might not have suited herself quite so well. You see I deal frankly with you, Digby, still; and will do so both now and hereafter, if you do not check me."

"Never, never will I!" answered Sir Edward Digby; "it was so you first commanded my esteem, even before my love; and so you will always keep it."

"Before your love?" said Zara, in an unwontedly serious tone; "your love is very young yet, Digby; and sometimes I can hardly believe all this to be real. — Will it last? or will it vanish away like a dream, and leave me waking, alone and sorrowful?"

"And yours for me, Zara?" asked her lover; but then, he added, quickly, "no, I will not put an unfair question: and every question is unfair that is already answered in one's own heart. Yours will, I trust, remain firm for me — so mine, I know, will for you, because we have seen each other under circumstances which have called forth the feelings, and displayed fully all the inmost thoughts which years of ordinary intercourse might not develop. But now, dear Zara, let us speak of our demeanour to each other. It will, perhaps, give us greater advantage if you treat me — perhaps, as a favoured, but not yet as an accepted lover. I will appear willingly as your humble slave and follower, if you will, now and then, let me know in private that I am something dearer; and by keeping up the character with me, which has gained you your uncle's commendation as a fair coquette, you may, perhaps, reconcile Mrs. Barbara to many things, which her notions of propriety might interfere with, if they were done as between the betrothed."

"I fear I shall manage it but badly, Digby," she answered. "It was very easy to play the coquette before, when no deeper feelings were engaged, when I cared for no one, when all were in—

different to me. It might be natural to me, then; but I do not think I could play the coquette with the man I loved. At all events, I should act the part but badly, and should fancy he was always laughing at me in his heart, and triumphing over poor Zara Croyland, when he knew right well that he had the strings of the puppet in his hand. However, I will do my best, if you wish it; and I do believe, from knowing more of this house than you do, that your plan is a good one. The airs I have given myself, and the freedom I have taken, have been of service both to myself and Edith — to her in many ways, and to myself in keeping from me all serious addresses from men I could not love. — Yours is the first proposal I have ever had, Digby; so do not let what my uncle has said, make you believe that you have conquered a queen of hearts, who has set all others at defiance.”

“No *gentleman* was ever refused by a *lady*,” answered Digby, laying a strong emphasis on each noun-substantive.

“So, then, you were quite sure, before you said a word!” cried Zara, laughing. “Well, that is as frank a confession as any of my own! And yet you might have been mistaken; for esteeming you as I did, and circumstanced as I was, I would have trusted you as much, Digby, if you had been merely a friend.”

“But you would not have shown me the deeper feelings of your heart upon other indifferent subjects,” replied her lover.

Zara blushed, and looked down; then suddenly changed the course of conversation, saying, “But you have not told me what Layton thought of all this, and what plans you have formed. What is to be done? Was he not deeply grieved and shocked?”

Sir Edward Digby told her all that had passed, and then added, “I intend now to send out my servant, Somers, to reconnoitre. He shall waylay Layton on his return, and bring me news of his success. If this youth be safely lodged in gaol, his pretensions are at an end, at least for the present; but if he again escape, I think, ere noon to-morrow, I must interfere myself. I have now a better right to do so than I have hitherto had; and what I have heard from other quarters will enable me to speak

boldly — even to your father, dear one — without committing either you or Edith.”

Zara paused and thought; but all was still dark on every side, and she could extract no ray of light from the gloom. Digby did not fail (as, how could a lover neglect?) to try to lead her mind to pleasanter themes; and he did so in some degree. But we have been too long eaves-dropping upon private intercourse, and we will do so no more. The rest of the day passed in that mingled light and shade, which has a finer interest than the mere broad sunshine, till the return of Sir Robert Croyland, when the deep sadness that overspread his countenance clouded the happiness of all the rest.

Shortly after, Zara saw her lover's servant ride up the road, at considerable speed; and as it wanted but half-an-hour to dinner-time, Digby, who marked his coming also, retired to dress. When he returned to the drawing-room, there was a deeper and a sterner gloom upon his brow than the fair girl had ever seen; but her father and aunt were both present, and no explanation could take place. After dinner, too, Sir Robert Croyland and his guest returned to the drawing-room together; and though the cloud was still upon Digby's countenance, and he was graver than he had ever before appeared, yet she whom he loved could gain no tidings. To her he was still all tenderness and attention; but Zara could not play the part she had undertaken; and often her eyes rested on his face, with a mute, sad questioning, which made her aunt say to herself, “Well, Zara is in love at last!”

Thus passed a couple of hours, during which not above ten words were uttered by Sir Robert Croyland. At length, lights were brought in, after they had been for some time necessary; and at the end of about ten minutes more, the sound of several horses coming at a quick pace was heard. The feet stopped at the great door, the bell rang, and voices sounded in the hall. The tones of one, deep, clear, and mellow, made both Zara and her father start; and in a minute after, the butler entered — he was an old servant — saying, in a somewhat embarrassed manner, “Colonel Sir Henry Layton, Sir, wishes to speak with you immediately on business of importance.”

“Who — who?” demanded Sir Robert, “Sir Henry Layton! — Well, well, take him in somewhere!”

He rose from his chair, but staggered perceptibly for a moment; then, overcoming the emotion that he could not but feel, he steadied himself by the arm of his chair, and left the room. Zara gazed at Digby, and he at her he loved; but this night Mrs. Barbara thought fit to sit where she was; and Digby, approaching Zara’s seat, bent over her, whispering, “Layton has a terrible tale to tell; but not affecting Edith. She is safe. — What more he seeks, I do not know.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AFTER parting with Sir Edward Digby at Woodchurch, Henry Layton had ridden on at a quick pace to Park-gate, and thence along the high road, to Cranbrook. He himself was habited in the undress of his regiment, though with pistols at his saddle, and a heavy sword by his side. One of his servants followed him similarly accoutred, and an orderly accompanied the servant, while by the young officer’s side appeared our good friend Mr. Mowle, heavily armed, with the somewhat anomalous equipments of a riding officer of Customs in those days. At a little distance behind this first group, came Cornet Joyce, and his party of dragoons; and in this order they all passed through Cranbrook, about nine o’clock; but a quarter of a mile beyond the little town they halted, and Mowle rode on for a short way alone, to the edge of Hangley Wood, which was now close before them. There he dismounted, and went in amongst the trees; but he was not long absent, for in less than five minutes he was by the Colonel’s side again. “All ’s right, Sir,” he said, “the boy assures me that they were all there still, at six this morning, and that their captain, Radford, does not move till after dark, to-night. So now we shall have the worst fellows amongst them — the two Ramleys and all.”

“Well, then,” answered Layton, “you had better go on at once with the party, keeping through the wood. I will remain

behind, coming on slowly; and if wanted, you will find me somewhere in the Hanger. Cornet Joyce has his orders in regard to surrounding the house; but of course he must act according to circumstances."

No more words were needed: the party of dragoons moved on rapidly, with Mowle at their head; and Layton, after pausing for a few minutes on the road, dismounted, and giving his rein to the servant, walked slowly on into the wood, telling the two men who accompanied him, to follow. There was, at that time, as there is now, I believe, a broad road through Hangle Wood, leading into the cross-road from Biddenden to Goudhurst; but at that period, instead of being tolerably straight and good, it was very tortuous, rough, and uneven. Along this forest path, for so it might be called, the dragoons had taken their way, at a quick trot; and by it their young Colonel followed, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his head bent down, in deep and anxious meditation. The distance across the wood at that part is nearly a mile; and when he had reached the other side, Layton turned upon his steps again, passed his servant and the orderly, and walked slowly on the road back to Cranbrook. The two men went to the extreme verge of the wood, and looked out towards Iden Green for a minute or two before they followed their officer, so that in the turnings of the road, they were out of sight by the time he had gone a quarter of a mile.

Layton's thoughts were busy, as may be well supposed; but at length they were suddenly interrupted by loud, repeated, and piercing shrieks, apparently proceeding from a spot at some distance before him. Darting on, with a single glance behind, and a loud shout to call the men up, he rushed forward along the road, and the next instant beheld a sight which made his blood boil with indignation. At first, he merely perceived a girl, struggling in the hands of some five or six ruffians, who were maltreating her in the most brutal manner; but in another instant, as, drawing his sword, he rushed forward, he recognised — for it can scarcely be said, he saw — poor Kate Clare. With another loud shout to his men to come up, he darted on without pause or hesitation; but his approach was observed — the ruffians with-

drew from around their victim; and one of them exclaimed, "Run, run! the dragoons are coming!"

"D — me! give her a shot before you go," cried another, "or she'll peach."

"Let her," cried young Radford — "but here goes;" and, turning as he hurried away, he deliberately fired a pistol at the unhappy girl, who was starting up wildly from the ground. She instantly reeled and fell, some seconds before Layton could reach her; for he was still at the distance of a hundred yards.

All this had taken place in an inconceivably short space of time; but the next minute, the panic with which the villains had been seized subsided a little. One turned to look back — another turned — they beheld but one man on the road; and all the party were pausing, when Layton reached poor Kate Clare, and raised her in his arms. It might have fared ill with him had he been alone; but just at that moment the orderly appeared at the turn, coming up at the gallop, with the young officer's servant behind him; and not doubting that a large party was following, Radford and his companions fled as fast as they could.

"On after them, like lightning!" cried Layton, as the men came up. "Leave the horse, leave the horse, and away! Watch them wherever they go, especially the man in the green coat! Thake him if you can — shoot him dead if he resist. Ah, my poor girl!" he cried, with the tears rising in his eyes, "this is sad, indeed! — Where has he wounded you?"

"There," said Kate, faintly, taking away her hand, which was pressed upon her right side; "but that was his kindest act. — Thank God, I am dying!"

"Nay, nay," answered Layton, "I trust not!" But the blood poured rapidly out, staining all her dress, which was torn and in wild disorder, and so rapidly did it flow, that Layton clearly saw her words would probably prove too true. "Who was that villain?" he cried; "I will punish him if there be justice on earth!"

"Don't you know him?" said Kate, her voice growing more and more low. "I thought you were seeking him — Richard Radford."

"The atrocious scoundrel!" said Layton; and drawing his handkerchief from his breast, he tied it tightly over her side, trying, though he saw it was nearly in vain, to stanch the blood, while at the same time he supported her against his knee with one arm thrown round her waist. Poor Kate closed her eyes with a faint shudder; and for a moment Layton thought she was dead. She appeared to be reviving again, however, when a loud voice, not far distant, exclaimed, "Ha, — halloo! What the devil is this?"

Layton looked suddenly up — for his eyes had been bent upon the poor girl's face for several minutes — and then beheld, hurrying up the road with a look of fury in his countenance, Kate's promised husband, Harding. With a violent oath the man rushed on, exclaiming, "Kate, what is all this? — Villain, have you misused the girl?"

"Hush, hush!" cried Layton, with a stern gesture of his hand; "she is dying! — I would have saved her if I could; but alas, I came too late!"

The whole expression of Harding's countenance changed in an instant. Grief and terror succeeded to rage; and, catching her frantically in his arms, he exclaimed — "Kate, Kate, speak to me! — Tell me, who has done this?"

"I can tell you," answered Layton — "Richard Radford."

While he was speaking, Kate Clare opened her eyes again, and gazed on Harding's face, moving her right hand faintly round and placing it upon his.

"Give me that handkerchief from your neck," said Layton; "if we can stop the blood, we may save her, yet. I have seen very bad wounds recovered from —"

"No, no!" said Kate Clare; "thank God, I am dying — I would rather die! — Harding, I am not in fault — they caught me in the wood — oh, they treated me horribly. Mr. Radford said it was revenge — God forgive him, God forgive him! But I would rather die thus in your arms — do not try to stop it — it is all in vain."

Layton and Harding still persisted, however, and bound another handkerchief tight over the wound, in some degree diminishing the stream of blood, but yet, not stopping it entirely.

"Let us carry her to some house," cried Layton, "and then send for assistance. See! her lips are not so pale."

"I will carry her," cried Harding, raising her in his powerful arms.

"To my aunt's, then — to my aunt's, Harding," murmured Kate; "I would sooner die there than in any other place." And on Harding sped, without reply, while Layton, sheathing his sword, which he had cast down, followed him, inquiring, "Is it far?"

"But a step, Sir," answered the smuggler. "Pray, come with us. — This must be avenged."

"It shall," replied Layton, sternly; "but I must stay here for a minute or two, till you can send somebody to me, to take my place, and let my men know where I am when they return."

Harding nodded his head, and then turned his eyes upon the face of the poor girl whom he bore in his arms, hurrying on without a moment's pause, till he was lost to the young officer's sight.

It is needless to describe the feelings of a high-minded and noble man like Layton, when left alone to meditate over the horrible outrage which had been committed under his very eyes. He gave way to no burst of indignation, indeed, but with a frowning brow walked back upon the road, caught his horse without difficulty, and mounting, remained fixed near the spot where poor Kate had received her death-wound, like a soldier upon guard. In less than ten minutes, a lad ran up, saying, "Mr. Harding sent me, Sir."

"Well, then, walk up and down here, my good boy," replied Layton, "till some one comes to inquire for me. If it should be a servant, or a single soldier, send him down to the place which you came from, and wait where you are till a larger party of dragoons come up, when you must tell them the same — to go down to me there. If the party come first, wait for the servant and the soldier."

Having given these directions, he was turning away, but paused again to inquire his way to the place where Harding was; and then pointing to a bundle that lay upon the road, he said — "You had better bring that with you."

Following the boy's direction, as soon as he issued out of the wood, Sir Henry Layton turned through a little field to the left; and seeing a small farm-house at some distance before him, he leaped his horse over two fences to abridge the way. Then riding into the farm-yard, he sprang to the ground, looking round for some one to take his charger. Several men of different ages were running about with eagerness and haste in their faces. Horses were being led forth from the stable; guns were in the hands of several; and one of them — a fine, tall, powerful young fellow — exclaimed, as soon as he saw Layton — “We will catch them, Sir — we will catch them! and by — they shall be hanged as high as Haman for hurting the poor dear girl — Here, take his honour's horse, Bill.”

“Is she still living?” asked Layton.

“Oh dear, yes, Sir!” cried the young man; “she seemed somewhat better for what mother gave her.”

“Well, then,” rejoined the young officer, “if you are going to search for these scoundrels, gallop up to the wood as fast as you can; you will find my servant and a trooper watching. They will give you information of which way the villains are gone. I will join you in a minute or two with a stronger force.”

“Oh, Sir, we shall do — we shall do,” cried William Harris; “we will raise the whole county as we go, and will hunt them down like foxes. Do they think that our sisters and our wives are to be ill-used and murdered by such scum as they are?” and at the same time he sprang upon his horse's back. Layton turned towards the house, but met the old farmer himself coming out with a great cavalry sword in his hand, and the butt end of a pistol sticking out of each pocket. “Quick, quick! to your horses!” he cried, “they shall rue the day — they shall rue the day! — Ah, Sir, go in,” he continued, seeing Layton; “she is telling my wife and Harding all about it; but I can't stop to hear. — I will have that young Radford's blood, if I have a soul to be saved!”

“Better take him alive, and hand him over to justice,” said Layton, going into the house.

“D—n him, I'll kill him like a dog!” cried the farmer; and mounting somewhat less nimbly than his son, he put himself at

the head of the whole party assembled, and rode fast away towards Hangley Wood.

In the meantime, Layton entered the kitchen of the farm; but it was quite vacant. Voices, however, were heard speaking above, and he ventured to go up and enter the room. Three or four women were assembled there round good Mrs. Harris's own bed, on which poor Kate Clare was stretched, with Harding on his knees beside her, and her hand in his, the hot tears of man's bitterest agony, coursing each other down his bronzed and weather-beaten cheek.

"There, there!" said Mrs. Harris; "don't take on so, Harding — you only keep down her spirits. She might do very well, if she would but take heart. You see she is better for the cordial stuff I gave her."

Harding made no reply; but Kate Clare faintly shook her head; and Layton, after having gazed on the sad scene for a moment, with bitter grief and indignation in his heart, drew back, thinking that his presence would only be a restraint to Kate's family and friends. He made a sign, however, to one of the women before he went, who followed him out of the room.

"I merely wish to tell you," he said, in a low voice, when the woman joined him at the top of the stairs, "that I am going back to the wood, to aid in the pursuit of these villains; for I can be of no use here, and may be there. If any of my people come, tell them where to find me; bid them follow me instantly, and stop every man on foot they see quitting the wood, till he gives an account of himself. — But had you not better send for a surgeon?"

"One is sent for, Sir," replied the woman; "but I think she is not so bad as she was. — I'll take care and tell your people. I do hope they will catch them, for this is *too* bad."

Without more words Layton went down, remounted his horse, and galloped back towards the edge of the wood. The news of what had happened, however, seemed to have spread over the country with the speed of lightning; for he saw four or five of the peasantry on horseback, already riding in the same direction across the fields. Two stout farmers joined him as he went, and

both were already full of the story of poor Kate Clare. Rage and indignation were universal amongst the people; but as usual on such occasions, one proposed one plan, and another the other, so that by want of combination in their operations, all their resolution and eagerness were likely to be fruitlessly employed.

Layton knew that it was of little use to argue on such points with undisciplined men; and his only trust was in the speedy arrival of the soldiers from Iden Green. When he reached the edge of the wood, however, with his two companions, they came upon farmer Harris's party, now swelled to twelve or thirteen men; and at the same moment his own servant rode round, exclaiming, as soon as he saw his master, "They are still in the wood, Sir, if they have not come out this way. They dispersed so that we could not follow them on horseback, and we galloped out by different ways to watch."

"They haven't come here," cried Farmer Harris, "or we should have seen them. So now we have them safe enough."

"Ride off towards Iden Green," said Layton to the servant, "and direct Cornet Joyce to bring down his men at the gallop to the edge of the copse. Let him dismount twelve on the north side of the wood, and, with all the farm-servants and country people he can collect, sweep it down, while the rest of the mounted men advance, on a line, on either side. — Stay, I will write;" and tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book, he put down his orders in pencil.

The man had just galloped away, when the young farmer, William Harris, shouted, "There they go — there they go! After them! — after them! Tally ho!" and instantly set spurs to his horse. All the rest but Layton followed at full speed; but he paused, and, directing his eyes along the edge of the wood, clearly saw, at the distance of somewhat more than half a mile, three men, who seemed to have issued forth from amongst the trees, running across the fields as fast as they could go. It would seem that they had not been aware of the numbers collected to intercept them, till they had advanced too far to retreat; but they had got a good start; the country was difficult for any but well-trained horses; and darting on, they took their way towards Goudhurst, passing

within a hundred yards of the spot where the victim of their horrid barbarity lay upon the bed of death.

Taking the narrow paths, leaping the stiles and gates, they at first seemed to gain upon the mass of peasantry who followed them, though their pursuers were on horseback and they on foot. But, well knowing the country, the farmers spread out along the small bridle-roads; and, while the better mounted horsemen followed direct across the fields, the others prepared to cut off the ruffians on the right and left. Gradually a semi-circle, enclosing them within its horns, was thus formed; and all chance of escape by flight was thus cut off.

In this dilemma, the three miscreants made straight towards a farm-house at which they occasionally received hospitality in their lawless expeditions, and which bears the name of "Smuggler Farm" to this day; but they knew not that all hearts had been raised against them by their late atrocities, and that the very tenant of the farm himself was now one of the foremost in pursuit. Rushing in, then, with no farther ceremony than casting the door open, they locked and barred it, just as some of the peasantry were closing in upon them; and then, hurrying to the kitchen, where the farmer's wife, his sister, and a servant was collected, Ned Ramley, who was the first, exclaimed, "Have you no hide, good dame?"

"Hide!" replied the stout farmer's wife, eyeing him askance — "not for such villains as you! Give me the spit, Madge; I've a great mind to run him through." Ned Ramley drew a pistol from his pocket; but at that moment the window was thrown up, the back door of the house was cast open, and half-a-dozen of the stout yeomanry rushed in. The smugglers saw that resistance would be vain; but still they resisted; and though, in the agitation of the moment, Ned Ramley's pistol was discharged innocuously, he did not fail to aim it at the head of young William Harris, who was springing towards him. The stout farmer, however, instantly levelled him with the ground by a thundering blow upon the head; and the other two men, after a desperate struggle, were likewise taken and tied.

"Lucky for you it was me, and not my father, Master Ramley,"

said William Harris. "He 'd have blown your brains out; but you 're only saved to be hanged, anyhow. — Ay, here he comes! — Stop, stop, old gentleman! he 's a prisoner; don't you touch him. — Let the law have the job, as the gentleman said."

"Oh, you accursed villain — oh, you hellish scoundrel," cried old Harris, kept back with difficulty by his son and the rest. "You were one of the foremost of them. But where is the greatest villain of them all? — where 's that limb of the devil, young Radford? — I will have him! Let me go, Will — I will have him, I say!"

Ned Ramley laughed aloud: "You won't, though," he answered, bitterly; "he 's been gone this half hour, and will be at the sea, and over the sea, before you can catch him. — You may do with me what you like, but he 's safe enough."

"Some one ride off and tell the officer what he says!" cried the farmer. But when the intelligence was conveyed to Sir Henry Layton, he was already aware that some of the men must have made their escape unobserved; for his servant had met Cornet Joyce and the party of dragoons by the way, and with the aid of a number of farm-servants from Iden Green and its neighbourhood, the wood had been searched with such strictness, that the pheasants, which were at that time numerous there, had flown out in clouds, as if a battue had been going on. He mistrusted Ned Ramley's information, however; knowing that the hardened villain would find a sort of pride in misleading the pursuers of young Radford, even though taken himself. Riding quickly across to the farm, then, together with Mowle and the Cornet, he interrogated the men separately, but found they were all in the same story, from which they varied not in the least — that Richard Radford had crept out by the hedges near the wood, and had gone first to a place where a horse was in waiting for him, and thence would make straight to the sea-side, where a boat was already prepared. Instant measures to prevent him from executing this plan now became necessary; and Layton directed the Cornet to hasten away as fast as possible in pursuit, sending information from Woodchurch to every point of the coast where the offender was likely to pass, spreading out his men so as to cover all the roads to the sea,

and only leaving at the farm a sufficient guard to secure the prisoners.

On hearing the latter part of this order, however, Farmer Harris exclaimed, "No, no, Sir; no need of that. We've taken them, and we'll keep them safe enough. I'll see these fellows into prison myself — ay, and hanged too, please God! and we'll guard them sure, don't you be afraid."

Layton looked to Mowle, saying, "I must abide by your decision, Mr. Mowle." But the officer answered: "Oh, you may trust them, Sir, quite safely, after all I hear has happened. But I think, Mr. Harris, you had better have just a few men to help you. You've got no place to keep them here; and they must be taken before a magistrate first, before they can be committed."

"Oh, we'll keep them safe enough," replied the farmer. "We'll put them in Goudhurst church, till we can send them off, and, in the meantime, I'll have them up before Squire Broughton. My son's a constable, so they are in proper hands."

"Very well," answered Layton; "in this case I have no right to interfere; but, of course, you are responsible for their safe custody."

"I say, Mowle," cried Ned Ramley, in his usual daring manner, "bid them give me something to drink, for I'm devilish thirsty; and I'll give you some information, if you will."

Mowle obtained some beer for him, and then demanded, "Well, what is it, Ned?"

"Why," only this, said Ned Ramley, after they had held the beer to his lips, and he had taken a deep draught — "you will have your brains blown out, before ten days are over."

"I am not afraid," replied Mowle, laughing.

"That's right," answered Ned Ramley. "But it will happen; for fifty of us have sworn it. We have had our revenge of your spy, Harding; and we have only you to settle with now."

"Harding!" cried Mowle. "He's no spy of mine. — It was not he that peached, you young scoundrel; it was one of those whom you trusted more than him."

"Ah, well," answered Ned Ramley, indifferently; "then he'll have a sore heart to-night, that he didn't work for. But you'll

have your turn yet, Mr. Mowle, so look that you make good use of your brains, for they won't be long in your skull."

"You are a hardened villain," said Sir Henry Layton. "You had better march them off as fast as you can, my good friends; take them before a magistrate; and above all things, get them to prison ere nightfall, or we may have another rescue."

"No fear, no fear!" answered Farmer Harris. "To rescue a smuggler is one thing — I never liked to see them taken myself — but blood-thirsty villains like these, that would ill use a poor, dear, good girl, and murder her in cold blood — why, there is not a man in the county would not help to hang them. But I wish, Sir, you would go yourself, and see and stop that other great villain. If he isn't hanged too, I don't think I shall ever rest in my bed again."

"I will do my best, depend upon it," replied Layton; "but I must first, Mr. Harris, go to your house, and see the state of that poor girl. I have known her since she was a child, and feel for her almost as if she were a sister."

"Thank you, Sir — thank you!" cried old Harris, shaking him by the hand. "There, boys," he continued, dashing away the tears from his eyes — "make a guard, and take these blackguards off in the middle of you. We'll have them up to Squire Broughton's at once; and then I must go back, too."

On his way to the farm, Layton desired Mowle to return to Woodchurch, and to wait for him there, taking every step that he might think necessary, with the aid of Captain Irby. "I will not be long," he added.

"Pray don't, Sir," rejoined Mowle; "for we have other business to do to-night;" and, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added, "I've got the information I wanted, Sir. A part of the goods are certainly at Radford Hall, and if we can seize them there, that, with the deposition of the men at Woodchurch, will bring him in for the whole offence."

"I shall, very likely, overtake you by the way," replied Layton. "But, at all events, I shall be there before four."

Most such calculations are vain, however. Layton turned aside to the Harris's farm, where he found poor Kate Clare

sinking rapidly. The curate of the parish had been sent for, and, by his advice, Mr. Broughton, the magistrate, who had entered the house but two or three minutes before Layton himself. Though her voice now scarcely rose above a whisper, she made her dying declaration with clearness and accuracy. It is not necessary here to give any of the details; but, as she concluded, she turned her faint and swimming eyes towards Layton, saying, "That gentleman, who has always been such a good friend to me and mine, can tell you more, Sir, for he came up to my help, just as they shot me."

The magistrate raised his eyes, and inquired, in a low tone, "Who is he?"

"Sir Henry Layton," replied the poor girl, loud enough for that officer to hear; and thinking that she asked for him, he approached nearer, and stood by Harding's side. Kate raised her hand a little from the bedclothes, as if she would have given it to him; and he took it kindly in his, speaking some words of comfort.

"Thank you, Sir — thank you, for all your kindness," said Kate. "I am glad you have come, that I may wish you good-bye, and ask you to be kind to poor Harding, too. It will soon be over now; and you had better all leave me. Not you, Harding — not you. — You must close my eyes, as my poor mother is not here."

A groan burst from the stout seaman's breast; and giving way to all his feelings, he sobbed like a child. According to her desire, Layton and Mr. Broughton retired from the room; and the young officer informed the magistrate, that the prisoners who had been taken were waiting for examination at his house.

"We shall want your evidence, Sir Henry," said the magistrate. "It is absolutely necessary, if, as I understand, you were eye-witness to the murder."

Layton saw the propriety of the magistrate's demand, and he yielded immediately. But the investigation was prolonged by several circumstances; and, what between the time that it took up, and that which had been previously spent in the pursuit of the murderers, it was past three o'clock before Layton mounted his horse at Mr. Broughton's door. He paused for an instant at the

gate of the Harris's farm-yard, where a girl was standing with tears in her eyes; but before he could ask any question, she replied to that which was rising to his lips. "She is gone, Sir," said the girl — "she is gone. She did not last half-an-hour after you were here."

With a sad heart, Layton rode on, passing at a quick pace through Harbourne Wood, and not trusting himself to stop at Mr. Clare's cottage. The windows, however, were closed; and the young officer concluded from that circumstance, that the tidings of her daughter's fate must by this time have reached the childless widow. Not far beyond her gate, he was met by Sir Edward Digby's servant; but eager to arrive at Woodchurch, Layton did not stop to speak with him, and Somers, turning his horse with the orderly and his old companion, Layton's servant, gleaned what information he could from them as he went.

Notwithstanding all the speed he could use, however, it was half-past four before Layton reached Woodchurch; and, on inquiring for Mr. Warde, he found that gentleman had called, but gone away again, saying he would return in an hour.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SUCH as we have described in the last chapter, were the fatal events to which Sir Edward Digby had alluded in the few words he had spoken to Zara Croyland; and it may be needless to explain to the reader, that he had learned the tale from his servant just before he came down to dinner.

Sir Robert Croyland, as we have shown, after some agitation and hesitation, quitted the drawing-room to meet, — the first time for many years — the son of a man, whom, at the instigation of others, he had cruelly persecuted. He paused as soon as he got into the passage, however, to summon courage, and to make up his mind as to the demeanour which he should assume — always a vain and fruitless task; for seldom, if ever, do circumstances allow any man to maintain the aspect which he has predetermined to affect. Sir Robert Croyland resolved to be cold, stately, and repulsive — to treat Sir Henry Layton as a perfect

stranger, and if he alluded to their former intimacy, to cut the conversation short by telling him that, as all the feelings of those days were at an end, he did not wish to revive their memory in any shape. He did not calculate, indeed, upon the peculiar state of Layton's mind, at the moment — nay, nor even upon the effect of his former favourite's personal appearance upon himself; and when he entered the library and saw the tall, powerful, dignified-looking man, the pale, thoughtful, stern countenance, and the haughty air, he felt all his predeterminations vain.

Layton, on his part, had done the same as Sir Robert Croyland, and in setting out from Woodchurch had made up his mind to see in the man he went to visit, nothing but Edith's father — to treat him kindly, gently, and with compassion for his weakness, rather than anger at his faults; but as he rode along, and conversed with one who accompanied him thither, the memory of much that Sir Robert Croyland had done in former days, came painfully back upon him, and combining with his treatment of Edith, raised up bitter and indignant feelings that he could have wished to quell. The scenes which he had passed through that day, too, had given a tone of sternness to his mind which was not usual; and the few minutes he had waited in the library, when every moment seemed of value, added impatience to his other sensations.

The baronet entered as firmly as he could, bowing his head and motioning coldly to a chair. But Layton did not sit down, gazing for an instant on the countenance of Sir Robert, struck and astonished by the change that he beheld. That steadfast gaze was painful to its object, and sank his spirit still farther; but Layton, the moment after, began to speak; and the well-known tones of his clear, mellow voice, awakened the recollection of the days when they were once pleasant to hear.

"Sir Robert Croyland," he said, "I have come to you on business of importance, in which it is necessary for you to act immediately in your magisterial capacity."

"I have no clerk with me, Sir," answered the baronet, in a hesitating manner; "at this late hour, it is not usual, except under circumstances —"

"The circumstances admit of no delay, Sir Robert Croyland," replied Layton. "As the nearest magistrate, I have applied to you in the first instance; and have done so for many other reasons besides your being the nearest magistrate."

"Well, Sir, what is your application?" demanded Edith's father. "I wish, indeed, you had applied to somebody else, at this time of night; but I will do my duty — oh, yes, I will do my duty."

"That is all that is required, Sir," answered the young officer. "My application is for a warrant to search the house of one Richard Radford; and I have to tender you, on oath, information that customable goods, which have been introduced without the payment of duty, are concealed on his premises. — One moment more, if you please — I have also to apply to you, upon similar evidence, for a warrant to search his house for his son, Richard Radford, charged with murder; and, in the end, if you would allow me to advise you, you would instantly mount your horse, and superintend the search yourself."

There was a marked and peculiar emphasis on the last few words, which Sir Robert Croyland did not understand. The manner was not agreeable to him; but it was scarcely perhaps to be expected that it should be; for there had been nothing in his own, to invite that kindly candour, which opens heart to heart. All that had of late years passed between him and Sir Henry Layton, had been of a repulsive kind. For one youthful error, he had not only repelled and shut his house against the son, but he had persecuted, ruined, and destroyed the father, who had no part in that fault. Every reason too, which he had given, every motive he had assigned, for his anger at Henry Layton's pretensions to Edith's hand, he had set at nought, or forgotten in the case of him whom he had chosen for her husband. Even now, although his manner was wavering and timid, it was cold and harsh; and it was a hard thing for Henry Layton to assume the tone of kindness towards Sir Robert Croyland, or to soften his demeanour towards him, with all the busy memories of the past and the feelings of the present thronging upon him, on his first return to the house where he had spent many happy days in youth.

I am painting a man, and nothing more; and he could not, and did not overcome the sensations of human nature.

His words did not please Sir Robert Croyland, but they somewhat alarmed him. Everything that was vague in his present situation, did produce fear; but after a moment's thought, he replied, coldly, "Oh dear no, Sir, I do not see that it is at all necessary I should go myself. I really think the application altogether extraordinary, seeing that it comes from, I am led to imagine, the lieutenant-colonel, commanding the — regiment of dragoons, quartered in this district, who has no primary power, or authority, or even duty in such affairs; but can only act as required by the officers of Customs, to whom he is so far subordinate. — But still I am ready to receive the informations tendered, and then shall decide in regard to my own conduct, as the case may require."

"You are wrong in all respects, but one, Sir Robert Croyland," answered Layton, at once; "I am empowered to act very differently from any officer who has been in command here before me. If my powers are beyond that which the law authorizes, those who gave them are responsible to their country; but, for an extraordinary case, extraordinary means are requisite; and as I require of you nothing but what the law requires, I shall not pause to argue, whether I am exactly the proper person to make the application. It might easily be made by another, who is without; but I have reasons for what I am doing — and reasons, believe me," he added, after a moment's pause and reflection, "not unfriendly to Sir Robert Croyland."

Again his words and manner were peculiar. Sir Robert Croyland began to feel some apprehension lest he might push his coldness too far. But he did not see how he could change his tone; and he was proceeding, with the same distant reserve, to repeat that he was ready to receive the information in a formal manner, when Layton suddenly interrupted him, after a severe struggle with himself.

"Sir Robert Croyland," he said, "let us speak as friends. Let griefs and complaints on both sides be forgotten for the moment; let us bury, for the time, seven years in oblivion. Look

upon me, if it be but for a few minutes, as the Henry Layton you knew before anything arose to produce one ill feeling between us; for, believe me, I come to you with kindly sentiments. Your own fate hangs in the balance at this hour. I would decide it favourably for you, if you would let me. But — you must shake off doubt and timidity; you must act boldly and decidedly, and all will be well.”

“I do not understand what you mean, Sir,” cried Sir Robert Croyland, astonished at his change of tone, and without time to collect his ideas, and calculate the probabilities. “My fate! — How can you affect my fate?”

“More than you are aware,” answered Layton; “even now I affect your fate, by giving you the choice of at once proceeding in the line of your duty, against a bad man who has overruled your better nature, too long, — by allowing you to conduct the search, which must be instituted either by yourself or others. — In one word, Sir Robert Croyland, I know all; and would serve you, if you would let me.”

“You know all!” exclaimed Edith’s father, in a dull, gloomy tone — “you know all! she has told you, then! That explains it — that shows how she retracted her consent — how she was willing to-day to sacrifice her father. You have seen her — you have taught her her part! — Yes, she has betrayed her parent’s confidence.”

Layton could bear no more. Himself, he could have heard slandered calmly; but he could not hear such words of her he loved: “It is false!” he said; “she did not betray your confidence! She told me no more than was needful to induce me to release her from bonds she was too faithful and true to break. From her I have heard nothing more — but from others I have heard all; and now, Sir Robert Croyland, you have chosen your part, I have but to call in those who must lay the required information. Our duty must be done, whatever be the consequences; and as you reject the only means of saving yourself from much grief — though, I trust, not the danger you apprehend — we must act without you;” and he rose and walked towards the door.

"Stay, Layton — stay!" cried Sir Robert Croyland, catching him eagerly by the arm — "yet a moment — yet a moment. You say you know all. Do you know all? — all? — everything?"

"All! — everything!" answered Layton, firmly; "every word that was spoken — every deed that was done — more than you know yourself."

"Then, at least, you know I am innocent," said the old man.

A calm but grave serenity took the place, on Sir Henry Layton's countenance, of the impetuous look with which he had last spoken. "Innocent," he said, "of intentional murder; but not innocent of rash and unnecessary anger; and, oh! Sir Robert Croyland — if I must say it — most culpable in the consequences which you have suffered to flow from one hasty act. Mark me; and see the result! — Your own dear child, against your will, is in the hands of a man whom you hate and abhor. You are anxious to make her the wife of a being you condemn and despise! The child of the man that your own hand slew, is now lying a corpse, murdered by him to whom you would give your daughter! Your own life is —"

"What, Kate! — Kate Clare!" exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland, with a sudden change coming over his countenance — "murdered by Richard Radford!"

"By his own hand, after the most brutal usage," replied Layton.

Sir Robert Croyland sprang to the bell, and rang it violently, then threw open the door and called aloud — "My horse! — my horse! — saddle my horse! — If it cost me land and living, life and honour, she shall be avenged!" he added, turning to Layton, and raising his head erect, the first time for many years. "It is over — the folly, and the weakness, and crime, are at an end. I have been bowed and broken; but there is a spark of my former nature yet left. I vowed to God in Heaven, that I would ever protect and be a father to that child, as an atonement — as some — some compensation, however small; and I will keep my vow."

"Oh! Sir Robert," cried Layton, taking his hand and press-

ing it in his, "be ever thus, and how men will love and venerate you!"

The barrier was broken down — the chain which had so long bound him was cast away; and Sir Robert returned Layton's grasp with equal warmth. "Harry," he said, "I have done you wrong; but I will do so no more. I was driven—I was goaded along the road to all evil, like a beast driven to the slaughter. But you have done wrong, too, young man—yours was the first offence."

"It was," answered Layton — "I own it — I did do wrong; and I will make no excuse, though youth, and love as true as ever man felt, might afford some. But let me assure you, that I have been willing to make reparation — I have been willing to sacrifice all the brightest hope of years to save you, even now. I assured Edith that I would, when she told me the little she could venture to tell; but it was her misery that withheld me — it was the life-long wretchedness, to which she was doomed if I yielded, that made me resist. Nothing else on earth should have stopped me; but now, Sir Robert, the prospect is more clear for you."

"Nay, do not speak of that," replied Sir Robert Croyland; "I will think of it no more — I have now chosen my path; and I will pursue it, without looking at the consequences to myself. Let them come when they must come; for once in life, I will do what is just and right."

"And by so doing, my dear Sir, you will save yourself," answered Layton. "Moved by revenge — with no doubt whatsoever of his motive — after a concealment of six years, this base man's accusation will be utterly valueless. Your bare statement of the real circumstances will be enough to dissipate every cloud. I shall require that all his papers be seized; and I have many just reasons for wishing that they should be in your hands."

"I understand you, Harry, and I thank you," said Sir Robert Croyland; "but with my present feelings I would not —"

"You do not understand me fully, Sir Robert," replied Layton. "I wish you only to act as you will find just, right, and honourable, and wait for the result. It will be, or I am much mistaken, more favourable to you, personally, than you ima-

gine. Now, as you have decided on the true and upright course, let us lose no time in carrying it into execution. I will call in the men who have to lay the information; and when you have received it, I will place before you depositions which will justify the most vigorous measures against both father and son. In regard to the latter, I must act under your authority in my military capacity, as I have no civil power there; but in regard to the former, I am already called upon, by the officers of the revenue, to aid them in entering his house by force, and searching it thoroughly."

"Call them in, Harry — call them in!" replied Sir Robert Croyland; "every man is justified by the law in apprehending a murderer. But you shall have full authority. — Kate Clare! — How could this have happened?"

"I will explain, as we ride on," answered Layton, going to the door; and speaking to one of the servants who was standing in the hall, he added, "Desire Mr. Mowle to walk in, and bring the boy with him."

In another minute, Mowle entered the room with another man, holding by the arm the boy Ray, whom the smugglers had chosen to denominate Little Starlight. He came, apparently, unwillingly; for though ever ready, for money, to spy and to inform secretly, he had a great abhorrence of being brought publicly forward; and when on coming to Mowle that evening with more information — he was detained and told he must go before a magistrate, he had made every possible effort to escape.

He was now somewhat surprised, on being brought forward after Mowle had laid the information, to find that he was not questioned upon any point affecting the smuggling transactions which had lately taken place, as the evidence upon that subject was sufficient without his testimony. But in regard to the proceedings of young Radford, and to the place where he was concealed, he was interrogated closely. It was all in vain, however. To obtain a straightforward answer from him was impossible; and although Mowle repeated distinctly that the boy had casually said, the murderer of poor Kate Clare had gone to his father's house, Little Starlight lied and prevaricated at every word, and impu-

dently, though not unskilfully attempted to put another meaning on his previous admission.

As time was wearing away, however, Sir Henry Layton, at length, interposed — “I think it is unnecessary, Sir Robert,” he said, “to push this inquiry further at present. As the whole house and premises must be searched on other grounds, we shall discover the villain if he is there. Mr. Mowle and I have adopted infallible means, I think, to prevent his escaping from any point of the coast; and the magistrates at every port were this evening furnished with such information that, if they act with even a moderate degree of ability, he must be taken.”

“Besides, Sir,” rejoined Mowle, “the frigate has come round; and she will take care that, with this wind, not a boat big enough to carry him over shall get out. We had better set out, your worship, if you please; for if old Radford gets an inkling of what is going on, he will double upon us some way.”

“I am quite ready,” said Sir Robert Croyland. “I will call my clerk to accompany us as we go, in case of any further proceedings being necessary. We must pass through the village where he lives.”

“With a firm step he moved towards the door; and, strange as it may seem, though for six years, while supposing he was taking the only means of self-preservation, he had lived in constant terror and anxiety, he felt no fear, no trepidation now, when he had determined to do what was right at every personal risk. An enfeebling spell seemed to have been taken off his mind; and the lassitude of doubt and indecision was gone. But such is almost always the result, even upon the nerves of our corporeal frame, of a strong effort of mental energy. It is one thing certainly to resolve, and another to do; but the very act of resolution, if it be sincerely exerted, affords a degree of vigour, which is sure to produce as great results as the means at our disposal can accomplish. Energetic determination will carry men through things that seem impossible, as a bold heart will carry them over Alps, that, viewed from their base, appear insurmountable.

Sir Robert Croyland did not venture into the drawing-room before he went; but he told the butler, who was waiting in the hall,

to inform Sir Edward Digby and the family that he had been called away on business, and feared he should not return till a late hour; and having left this message, he went out upon the terrace. He found there a number of persons assembled, with some twenty or thirty of the dragoons. Five or six officers of the Customs were present, besides Mowle; but the darkness was too great to admit of their faces being seen; and Sir Robert Croyland mounted without speaking to any one. Sir Henry Layton paused for an instant to give orders, that the boy should be taken back to Woodchurch, and kept there under a safe guard. He then spoke a few words to Digby's servant, Somers, and springing on his horse placed himself at Sir Robert Croyland's side.

The night was as dark as either of the two which had preceded it; the same film of cloud covered the sky; not a star was to be seen; the moon was far below the horizon; and slowly the whole party moved on, two and two abreast, through the narrow lanes and tortuous roads of that part of the country. It halted for a minute in the nearest village, while Sir Robert Croyland stopped at his clerk's house, and directed him to follow as fast as possible to Mr. Radford's; and then, resuming their march, the dragoons, and those who accompanied them, wound on for between four or five miles further, when, as they turned the angle of a wood, some lights, apparently proceeding from the windows of a house half way up a gentle slope, were seen shining out in the midst of the darkness.

"Halt!" said Sir Henry Layton; and before he proceeded to give his orders, for effectually surrounding the house and grounds of Mr. Radford, he gazed steadfastly for a moment or two upon the building which contained her who was most dear to him, and whose heart he well knew was at that moment wrung with the contention of many a painful feeling. "I promised her I would bring her aid, dear girl," he thought, "and so I have. — Thanks be to God, who has enabled me!"

Sir Robert Croyland, too, gazed — with very different feelings, it is true, but still with a stern determination that was not shaken in the least. It seemed, when he thought of Kate Clare, that he was atoning to the spirit of the father, by seeking to avenge

the child; and the whole tale of her wrongs and death, which he had heard from Layton, as they came, had raised the desire of so doing almost to an enthusiasm. Human passions and infirmities, indeed, will mingle with our best feelings; and as he gazed upon Mr. Radford's house, and remembered all that he had endured for the last six years, he said to himself, with some bitterness, "That man shall now taste a portion of the same cup he has forced upon others."

Sir Henry Layton woke from his reverie sooner than his companion; and turning his horse, he spoke for a few moments with Mowle, somewhat longer with another person wrapped in a dark horseman's coat behind, and then gave various distinct orders to the dragoons, who immediately separated into small parties, and, taking different roads, placed themselves in such positions as to command every approach to the house. Then riding forward with Sir Robert Croyland, the officers of Customs, and one or two soldiers, he turned up the little avenue which led from the road, consulting with Edith's father as he went. At about a couple of hundred yards from the house he paused, turning his head and saying to Mowle, "You had better, I think, all dismount; and, making fast the horses, get behind the nearest laurels and evergreens, while Sir Robert and I ride on alone, and ask admission quietly. When the door is opened, you can come up and make yourselves masters of the servants till the search is over. I do not anticipate any resistance; but if the young man be really here, it may be made."

He then rode on with the baronet at a quicker pace, the noise of their horses' feet, as they trotted on and approached the great doors, covering the sound of the movements of the party they left behind.

The house, to which the actual possessor had given the name of Radford Hall, was an old-fashioned country mansion, and presented, like many another building at that time, several large, iron hooks, standing out from the brick-work on each side of the door-way, on which it was customary for visitors on horseback to hang their rein while they rang the bell, or till a servant could be called to take them to the stable. Sir Robert Croyland was ac-

quainted with this peculiarity of the house, though Layton was not, and he whispered to his companion — “Let us hook up our horses, before we ring.”

This was accordingly done; and then taking the long iron handle of the bell, Layton pulled it gently. A minute or two after, a step sounded in the hall, and a servant appeared — a stout, red-faced, shrewd-looking fellow, who at first held the great door only half open. As soon, however, as he saw Sir Robert Croyland’s face, he threw it back, replying, in answer to the baronet’s question as to whether Mr. Radford was at home, “Yes, Sir Robert, he has been home this hour.”

Layton had stood back, and, in the darkness, the man did not see him, or took him for a groom; but when the young officer advanced, and the uniform of the dragoon regiment became apparent, Mr. Radford’s servant suddenly stretched his hand towards the door again, as if about to throw it violently to. But Layton’s strong grasp was on his shoulder in a moment. “You are my prisoner,” he said, in a low tone; “not a word — not a syllable, if you would not suffer for it. No harm will happen to you, if you are only quiet.”

At the same moment, Mowle and the rest came running across the lawn, and, giving the man into their hands, Layton entered the house with Sir Robert Croyland.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ABOUT an hour before the event took place, which we have last related, Edith Croyland sat in a small drawing-room at the back of Mr. Radford’s house, in which she had been kept captive — for we may well use that term — ever since her removal from Mr. Croyland’s. Her first day had been spent in tears and indignation; for immediately after her arrival, on finding that her father was not really there, she became convinced that she had been deceived, and naturally doubted that it was with his consent she had been removed. Nor had Mr. Radford’s manner at all tended to do away with this impression. He laughed at her remonstrances and indignation, treated her tears with cold in-

difference, and told his servants, before her face, that she was on no account to be suffered to go out, or to see any one but Sir Robert Croyland. In other respects, he treated her well — did all in his power to provide for her comfort; and, as his whole establishment was arranged upon a scale of luxury and extravagance rarely met with in the old country houses of the gentry of that time, none of the materials of that which is commonly called comfort were wanting.

But it was the comfort of the heart which Edith required, and did not find. Mr. Radford handed her down to dinner himself, and with as much ceremonious politeness as he could show, seated her at the end of his ostentatious table: but Edith did not eat. She retired at night to the downy bed prepared for her: but Edith did not sleep. Thus passed the first day and the morning of the second; and when, about noon, Sir Robert Croyland arrived, he found her pale and wan with anxiety and watching; and he left her paler still; for he resisted all her entreaties to take her thence; and her last hope of relief was gone.

He had spoken kindly — tenderly, indeed; he had even shed tears; but his mind at the time of his visit was still in a state of suspense, irritated by injuries and insult, but not yet roused by indignation to dare the worst that Mr. Radford could do; and, though he heard her express her determination never to marry Richard Radford unless set free from her vows to Henry Layton, without remonstrance, only begging her to keep that resolution secret till the last moment, yet, with the usual resource of weakness, he sought to postpone the evil hour by seeming to enter into all his enemy's views.

Thus had passed Edith's time; and it is unnecessary to enter into a more detailed account of her thoughts and feelings previous to the period we have mentioned — namely, one hour before the arrival of her father and Henry Layton at the door of the house. She was sitting, then, in that small back drawing-room, with her fair cheek leaning on her hand, her eyes bent down upon the table, and her mind busy with the present and the future. "It is foolish," she thought, "thus to alarm myself. No harm can happen. They dare not show me any violence; and no clergy-

man in England will venture to proceed with the service against my loud dissent. My uncle, and Layton too, must soon hear of this, and will interfere. — I will not give way to such terrors any more."

As she thus meditated, she heard a rapid step upon the great stairs; and the next moment Mr. Radford entered — booted, spurred, and dusty, as from a journey, and with a heavy horse-whip in his hand. His face betrayed more agitation than she had ever seen it display. There was a deep line between his brows, as if they had been long bent into such a frown, that they could not readily be smoothed again. His long upper-lip was quivering with a sort of impatient vehemence that would not be restrained; and his eye was flashing, as if under the influence of some strong passion.

"Well, Miss Croyland," he said, throwing his horsewhip down upon the table, and casting himself into a chair, "I hope they have made you comfortable during my absence?"

Edith merely bowed her head, without reply.

"Well, that's civil!" cried Mr. Radford; "but I think every body is going mad, and so it is no wonder that women do! Miss Croyland, I have a piece of news for you — there's going to be a wedding in our house, to-night!"

Still Edith was silent, and looked towards the fire.

"I tell you of the fact," continued Mr. Radford, "because it may be necessary for you to make some little preparation for your journey. I don't know whether you hear or not; but you are to be married to my son, to-night. It is now nine; the clergyman and Richard will be here by eleven; and the marriage will take place half an hour before twelve. So you have two hours and a half to prepare."

"You are mistaken altogether; Mr. Radford," replied Edith, in as firm a tone as she could assume. "It is not my intention to marry your son at all. I have often told you so — I now repeat it."

"You do, do you!" exclaimed Mr. Radford, giving her a furious glance across the table; "then I will tell you something, young woman. Your consent was given to your father; and I will

have no trifling backwards and forwards. Circumstances have arisen to-day — curses be upon them all! — which render it necessary that the marriage should take place four-and-twenty hours before it was first fixed, and it shall take place, by — !” and he added a terrible oath.

“You will find it will not take place, Mr. Radford,” replied Edith, in the same tone as before, “for, in the first place, I never did consent. My father left me fainting, without waiting to hear what I had to say, or he would not have so deceived himself.”

“Then he shall die the death of a felon,” cried Mr. Radford, “and you yourself shall be the person to put the rope round his neck.”

“Whatever be the consequences, I shall be firm,” replied Edith; “but at the same time, let me tell you, I do not believe you have the power you suppose. You may bring a false accusation — an accusation you know to be false; but such things are never so well prepared but they are discovered at last; and so it will be in your case.”

“A false accusation!” exclaimed Mr. Radford vehemently — “an accusation I know to be false! I’ll soon show you that, girl;” and starting up from his seat, he hurried out of the room.

Contrary to Edith’s expectation, Mr. Radford was absent for a long time; but when he returned he had several papers in his hand, some apparently freshly written, and one which bore the yellow marks of age. His face was stern and resolute, but displayed less excitement than when he left her. He entered with a slow step, leaving the door partly open behind him, seated himself, and gazed at her for a moment, then spread out the small yellow paper on the table, but held his hand tight upon the lower part, as if he feared she might snatch it up and destroy it.

“There, look at that, Miss Croyland!” he said; “you spoke of false accusations; look at that, and be ashamed of bringing them yourself.”

Edith gave a glance towards it with a sensation of awe, but did not attempt to read it. Her eye rested upon the words, Deposition of —” and upon a stain of blood at the bottom of the page, and

she turned away with a shudder. "I have heard of it before," she answered, "yet every word in it may be false."

"False, or not false," replied Mr. Radford, "it sends your father to gaol to-morrow, and to the gallows a month after — if you do not instantly sign that!" and he laid another freshly written page open before her.

Edith took it in her hand, and read — "I hereby consent and promise, when called upon, to marry Richard Radford, junior, Esquire, the son of Richard Radford, of Radford Hall."

"You have your choice, Miss Croyland," continued her persecutor, in a low and bitter tone, "either to save your father, or to put him to death with your own hands; for I swear, by all that I hold sacred, that if you do not instantly sign that paper — ay, and fulfil its engagement, I will send off this deposition to the bench of magistrates, with the letter I have just written, giving an account of all the circumstances, and explaining how, out of weak kindness and friendship for Sir Robert Croyland, I have been prevailed upon to keep back the information until now. Do not deceive yourself, and think that his fortune or his station will save him. A peer of the realm has been hanged before now for the murder of his own servant. Neither must you suppose that upon that deposition alone rests the proof of his guilt. There was other evidence given at the Coroner's inquest, all bearing upon the same point, which requires but this light, to be made plain. The threats your father previously used, the falsehoods he told regarding where he had been — all these things can be proved, for I have taken care to preserve that evidence."

"That was like a friend, indeed!" murmured Edith; "but such are the friendships of the world."

"I am acting like a friend to you, Miss Croyland," rejoined Mr. Radford, apparently neither touched nor hurt by her words, "in letting you see clearly your father's situation, while I give you the opportunity of saving him if you will. Do as you please — there is the paper. Sign it if you like; but sign it quickly; for this night brings all tergiversation to an end. I will have no more of it; and five minutes decides your father's life or death. Do not say I do it. It is you. His pardon is before you. You have no-

thing to do but to put your name. If you do not, you sign his death warrant!"

"Five minutes!" said Edith, with her heart beating violently.

"Ay, five minutes," answered Mr. Radford, who saw, from the wild look of her beautiful eyes, and the ashy paleness of her cheek and lips, how powerfully he had worked upon her — "five minutes, no longer;" and he laid his watch upon the table. Then, turning somewhat ostentatiously to a small fixed writing-desk, which stood near, he took up a stick of sealing-wax, and laid it down beside the letter he had written, as if determined not to lose a moment beyond the period he had named.

Edith gazed upon the paper for an instant, agitated and trembling through her whole frame; but her eye fell upon the name of Richard Radford. His image rose up before her, recalling all the horror that she felt whenever he was in her presence; then came the thought of Layton, and of her vows to him yet uncanceled. "Richard Radford!" she said to herself — "Richard Radford! — marry him — vow that I will love him — call God to witness, when I know I shall abhor him more and more — when I love another? I cannot do it — I will not do it!" and she pushed the paper from her, saying, aloud, "No, I will not sign it!"

"Very well," said Mr. Radford — "very well. Your parent's blood be upon your head;" and he proceeded to fold up slowly the deposition he had shown her, in the letter he had written. But he stopped in the midst; and then, abandoning the calm, low tone, and stern but quiet demeanour which he had lately used, he started up, striking the table violently with his hand, and exclaiming, in a loud and angry tone, "Wretched, miserable girl, dare you bring upon your head the guilt of parricide? What was the curse of Cain to that? How will you bear the day of your father's trial — ay, how bear the day of his death — the lingering agony of his imprisonment — the public shame of the court of justice — the agony of the gallows and the cord? — the proud Sir Robert Croyland become the gaze of hooting boys, the spectacle of the rude multitude, expiring, through his daughter's fault, by the hand of the common hangman! Ay, think of it all, for in

another minute it will be too late! Once gone from my hand, this paper can never be recalled."

Edith uttered a faint cry; but at the same moment a voice behind Mr. Radford said, "Nor can it, now!" and Sir Robert Croyland himself laid his hand upon the papers.

Mr. Radford turned round fiercely, and was darting forward to seize them from him; but he was held back by a more powerful arm; and the baronet went on, in a voice grave and sad, but firm and strong — "Sir Henry Layton," he said, "I give these papers into your hands to do with exactly as you may think right, as a man of honour, a gentleman, and a respecter of the law. I ask not to hold them for one moment."

"Do not struggle, Sir, — do not struggle!" cried Layton, holding Mr. Radford fast by the collar — "you are a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" exclaimed Mr. Radford. "What! in my own house — a magistrate!"

"Anywhere, Sir," answered Layton; "and for the time, you are a magistrate no longer. — Ho! without there! — send some one in!"

Edith had sunk down in her seat; for she knew not whether to rejoice or grieve. The first feeling undoubtedly was joy; but the next was bitter apprehension for her father. At first she covered her eyes with her hands; for she thought to hear the terrible truth proclaimed aloud; but when she looked up, Sir Robert Croyland's face was so calm, so resolute, so unlike what it had ever appeared of late years, that fear gave way to surprise, and surprise began to verge into hope. As that bright flame arose again in her heart, she started up, and cast herself upon her father's bosom, murmuring, while the tears flowed rapidly from her eyes, "Are you safe — are you safe?"

"I know not, my dear child," replied Sir Robert Croyland; "but I am now doing my duty, and that gives me strength."

In the meantime, a dragoon had appeared at the door, and as soon as Mr. Radford beheld him, he exclaimed, "This is a base and infamous plot to defeat the ends of justice. I understand it all: the military power called in, right willingly, I have no doubt, to take away the documents which prove that felon's guilt. But

this shall be bitterly repaid, and I hold you responsible, Sir, for the production of these papers."

"Certainly, Mr. Radford," replied Layton, with a calm smile, "I will be responsible. But as you object to the military power, we will hand you over to the civil. Hart," he continued, speaking to the soldier, "call up Mowle or Birchett, or any of the other officers, and let them bring one of the constables with them, for this is not purely a case for the Customs. Then tell Serjeant Shaw to bring on his men from the back, as I directed, seeing that nothing — not an inch of ground, not a shed, not a tool-house, remains unexamined."

"Of what am I accused, Sir, that you dare to pursue such a course in my house?" demanded Mr. Radford.

"Of murder, Sir," replied Sir Henry Layton.

"Murder!" exclaimed Mr. Radford, and then burst into an affected laugh.

"Yes, Sir," replied the young officer; "and you may find it not so much a jest as you suppose; for though the law, in consequence of the practices of yourself and others, has slept long ineffective, it is not dead. I say for murder! as an accessory before the fact, to the armed resistance of lawful authority, in which his majesty's subjects have been killed in the execution of their duty; and as an accessory after the fact, in harbouring and comforting the actual culprits, knowing them to be such."

Mr. Radford's countenance fell; for he perceived that the matter was much more serious than he at first supposed. He trusted, indeed, from the laxity with which the law had lately been carried into execution, that he might escape from the gravest part of the charge; but still, if Sir Henry Layton was in a condition to prove the participation of which he accused him, in the crimes that had been committed, nothing short of transportation for life could be anticipated. But he had other sources of anxiety. His wretched son, he expected to present himself every minute; and well aware of the foul deed which Richard Radford had that morning perpetrated, and of his person having been recognised, he was perfectly certain, that his apprehension would take place. He would have given worlds to speak for a single instant with one of

his own servants; but none of them appeared; and while these thoughts were passing rapidly through his brain, the officer Birchett entered the room with a constable, and several other persons followed them in. He was startled from his reverie, however, by Sir Henry Layton's voice demanding — "Have you brought handcuffs, constable?"

"Oh, ay, Sir," answered the man, "I've got the bracelets."

"Good evening, Mr. Radford," said Birchett; "we have hold of you at last, I fancy."

Mr. Radford was silent, and the young officer demanded, "Have you found anything else, Birchett?"

"Oh yes, Sir, plenty," answered Birchett, "and besides the run goods, things enough to prove all the rest even if we had not proof sufficient before — one of your own dragoon's swords, Sir, that must have been snatched up from some poor fellow who was killed. Corporal Hart says, he thinks it belonged to a man named Green."

"Well, there is your prisoner," replied Layton, — "you and the constable must take care that he be properly secured. No unnecessary harshness, I beg; but you know how rescue is sometimes attempted, and escape effected. You had better remove him to another room; for we must have all the papers and different articles of smuggled goods brought hither."

"I protest against the whole of this proceeding," exclaimed Mr. Radford, on whom the constable was now unceremoniously fixing a pair of handcuffs, "and I beg every body will take notice of my protest. This person, who is, I suppose, a military officer, is quite going beyond his duty, and acting as if he were a civil magistrate."

"I am acting under the orders and authority of a magistrate, Sir," replied Sir Henry Layton, "and according to my instructions. — Dear Edith," he continued, crossing over to her, and taking her hand as she still clung to her father; for all that I have described had taken place with great rapidity — "you had better go into another room till this is over. We shall have some papers to examine, and I trust another prisoner before the search is finished. — Had she not better retire, Sir Robert?"

But Mr. Radford raised his voice again, as the constable was moving him towards the door, exclaiming, "At all events, I claim my right to witness all these extraordinary proceedings. It is most unjust and illegal for you to seize and do what you will with my private papers, in my absence."

"It is a very common occurrence," said Sir Henry Layton, "in criminal cases like your own."

"Let him remain — let him remain!" said Sir Robert Croyland. "He can but interrupt us a little. — Oh, here is the clerk at last! — Now, Edith, my love, you had better go; these are no scenes for you."

Layton took her by the hand, and led her to the door, bending down his head and whispering as he went, "Be under no alarm, dear girl. All will go well."

"Are you sure, Harry — are you sure?" asked Edith, gazing anxiously in his face.

"Certain," he replied; "your father's decision has saved him."

As he spoke, there was a violent ringing at the bell; and Mr. Radford said to himself, "It is that unhappy boy; he will be taken, to a certainty." But the next instant, he thought, "No — no, he would never come to the front door. It must be some more of their party."

Sir Robert Croyland, in the meantime, seated himself at the end of the table, and handed over a number of papers, which Layton had given him at his own house, to the clerk, who, by his direction, seated himself near. "I have no objection, Mr. Radford," he said, turning to the prisoner, "that you should hear read, if you desire it, the depositions on which I have granted a warrant for your apprehension, and, at the requisition of the officers of Customs, have authorized your premises to be searched for the smuggled goods, a part of which has been found upon them. The depositions are those of a man named George Jones, since dead, and of Michael Scalesby, and Edward Larchant, at present in the hands of justice; and the information is laid by John Mowle and Stephen Birchett."

At the recital of the names of several of the men whom he him-

self had furnished with arms and directions, Mr. Radford's heart sunk; but the moment after, a gleam of bitter satisfaction sprang up in his breast, as the door opened, and Mr. Zachary Croyland entered, exclaiming, "How's this — how's this? I came to take a dove out of a hawk's nest, and here I find the dogs unearthing a fox."

"I am very glad you are come, Sir," replied Mr. Radford, before any one else could speak; "for, though you are the brother of that person sitting there, you are a man of honour, and an honest man —"

"More than I can say for you, Radford," grumbled Mr. Croyland.

"And, moreover, a magistrate for this county," continued Mr. Radford.

"I never act — I never act!" cried the old gentleman. "I never have acted; I never will act."

"But in this case I shall insist upon your acting," said the prisoner; "for your brother, who is now proceeding thus virulently against me, does it to shield himself from a charge of murder, which he knew I was about to bring against him."

"Fiddlesticks' ends!" cried Mr. Croyland. "This is what people call turning the tables, I think. But it won't succeed with me, my good friend. I am an old bird — a very old bird, indeed — and I don't like chaff at all, Radford. If you have any charge to make against my brother, you must make it where you are going. I'll have nothing to do with it. I always knew him to be a fool; but never suspected him of being anything else."

"At all events," said Mr. Radford, in a gloomy tone, "since simple justice is denied me at all hands, I require that the papers which have been seized in this house, be placed in proper hands, and duly authenticated. The important evidence of the crime of which I charge him, has been given by your brother, Sir, to one who has but too great an interest, I believe, to conceal or destroy it. I say it boldly, those papers are not safe in the keeping of Sir Henry Layton; and I demand that they be given up, duly marked by the clerk, and signed by myself, and some independent person."

Layton's eyes flashed for a moment, at the insinuation which the prisoner threw out; but he overcame his anger instantly, and took the papers which had been handed him, from his pocket, saying, "I will most willingly resign these documents, whatever they may be. Mr. Croyland, this person seems to wish that you should keep them, rather than myself; but here is another paper on the table, which may throw some light upon the whole transaction;" and he took up the written promise, which Mr. Radford had been urging Edith to sign — and on which his own eyes had been fixed during the last few minutes — and handed it, with the rest, to her uncle.

"Stay, stay a moment!" said Mr. Croyland, putting on his spectacles. "I will be responsible for the safe keeping of nothing of which I do not know the contents;" and he proceeded to read aloud the engagement to wed Richard Radford, which Edith had rejected. "Ay, a precious rascally document, indeed!" said the old gentleman, when he had concluded; "written in the hand of the said Richard Radford, Esq., senior, and which, I suppose, Miss Croyland refused to sign under any threats. Be so good as to put your name on that, at the back, Mr. Clerk. I will mark it, too, that there be no mistake."

"And now, Sir, since you have read the one, will you be good enough to read the other?" exclaimed Mr. Radford, with a triumphant smile. "Even-handed justice, if you please, Mr. Zachary Croyland; the enclosure first, then the letter, if you will. I see there are a multitude of persons present; I beg they will all attend."

"I will read it certainly," replied Mr. Croyland, drawing one of the candles somewhat nearer. "It seems to be somewhat indistinct."

Sir Robert Croyland leaned his head upon his hand, and covered his eyes; and several persons pressed forward, to hear what seemed of importance — in the eyes of the prisoner, at least.

Mr. Croyland ran over the writing, as a preliminary to reading it aloud; but, as he did so, his countenance fell, and he paused and hesitated. The next moment, however, he exclaimed, "No, hang it! It shall be read — 'The deposition of William Clare,

now lying at the point of death, and with the full assurance that he has not many minutes to live, made before Richard Radford, Esquire, J. P.; this 24th day of September, in the year of grace 17—;” and he proceeded to read, with a voice occasionally wavering indeed, but in general firm and clear, the formal setting forth of the same tale which the reader has heard before, in the statement of Sir Robert Croyland to his daughter.

His brother paused, and held the paper in his hand for a moment after he had done, while Layton, who had been standing close beside him, bore a strange, almost sarcastic smile upon his lip, which strongly contrasted with the sad and solemn expression of Mr. Croyland’s countenance.

“What is this great red blot just below the man’s name?” asked the old gentleman, at length, looking to Mr. Radford.

“That, Sir,” replied the prisoner, in a calm, grave tone, which had much effect upon the hearers, “is the poor fellow’s own blood, as I held him up to sign the declaration. He had been pressing his right hand upon the wound, and where it rested on the paper it gave that bloody witness to the authenticity of the document.”

There was something too fine in the reply, and Mr. Croyland repeated, “Bloody witness! — authenticity of the document!”

But Layton stretched out his hand, saying, “Will you allow me to look at the paper, Mr. Croyland?” and then added, as soon as he received it, “Can any one tell me whether William Clare was left-handed?”

“No!” replied Sir Robert Croyland, suddenly raising his head — “no, he was not. — Why do you ask?”

“That I can answer for,” said the constable, coming forward, “for he carved the stock of a gun for me; and I know he never used his left hand when he could use his right one.”

“Why do you ask, Harry? — why do you ask?” exclaimed Mr. Croyland.

“Because, my dear Sir,” answered Layton, aloud and clear, “this is the print of the thumb of a man’s right hand. To have made it at all, he must have held the paper with his right, while he signed with his left, and even then, he could have done it with

difficulty, as it is so near the signature, that his fingers would not have room to move;" and as he ended, he fixed his eyes sternly on Mr. Radford's face.

The prisoner's countenance had changed several times while Sir Henry Layton spoke, first becoming fiery red, then deadly pale, then red again.

"However it happened, so it was," he said, doggedly.

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Croyland, sharply, "your evidence will fetch what it is worth! — I hope, clerk, you have got down Mr. Radford's statement."

"He has written the same down here, your worship," replied the man, pointing to the letter in which the deposition had been enclosed, and which, having been cast down by Mr. Zachary, had been busily read by the clerk.

"Well, then, we will read that too," observed the old gentleman. "Silence there!" he continued; for there was a good deal of noise at the side of the room, as the different persons present conversed over the events that were passing; "but first, we had better docket this commodity which we have just perused. Mr. Clerk, will you have the goodness to sign it also — on the back?"

"Stay," said a voice from behind the rest, "let me sign it first;" and the man who had accompanied Layton thither, wrapped in the dark horseman's coat, advanced between Mr. Croyland and the clerk.

"Any one that likes — any one that likes," answered the former. "Ah, is that you, my old friend?"

Both Mr. Radford and Sir Robert Croyland gazed, with looks of surprise not unmingled with more painful feelings, on the countenance of Mr. Warde, though each doubted his identity with one whom they had known in former years. But, without noticing any one, the strange-looking old man took the paper from the clerk, dipped the pen in the ink, and, in a bold, free hand, wrote some words upon the back.

"Ha, what is this?" cried Mr. Croyland, taking the paper, and reading — "An infamous forgery — Henry Osborn!"

"Villain, you are detected!" cried the person who has been called Mr. Warde. "I wrote from a distant land to warn you, that I was present when you knelt by William Clare — that I heard all — that I marked you try to prompt the dying man to an accusation he would not make — that I saw you stain the paper with his blood — ay, and sign it, too, after life had quitted him — I wrote to warn you; for I suspected you, from all I heard of your

poor tool's changed conduct; and I gave you due notice, that if you ceased not, the day of retribution would arrive. It is come; and I am here, though you thought me dead! All your shifts and evasions are at an end. There is no collusion here — there is no personal interest. I have not conversed with that weak man for many years — and he it was who persecuted my sister's husband unto death!"

"At his suggestion — from his threats!" exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland, pointing with his hand to Mr. Radford.

"Take me away," said the prisoner, turning to the constable — "I am faint — I am sick — take me away!"

Mr. Croyland nodded his head; and, supported by the constable and Birchett, Mr. Radford was led into the adjoining room.

The scene that followed is indescribable. It was all confusion; every one spoke at once; some strove to make themselves heard above the rest; some seemed little to care whether they were heard or not; if any man thought he could fix another's attention, he tried to converse with him apart — many fixed upon the person nearest; but one or two endeavoured to make others hear across the room; and all order and common form were at an end.

I have said every one spoke; but I should have made one exception. Sir Robert Croyland talked eagerly with his brother, and said a few low words to Mr. Osborn; but Layton remained profoundly silent for several minutes. The din of many voices did not seem to disturb him; the strange turn that events had taken, appeared to produce no surprise; but he remained fixed to the same spot, with his eyes bent upon the table, and his mind evidently absent from all that was passing round. It was the abstraction of profound emotion; the power which the heart sometimes exercises over the mind, in withdrawing all its perceptions and its operative faculties from external things, to fix them concentrated upon some great problem within. At length, however, a sense of higher duties made him shake off the thoughts of his own fate and situation — of the bright and glorious hopes that were rising out of the previous darkness, like the splendour of the coming star after a long night — of the dreams of love and joy at length — of the growing light of "trust in the future," still faintly overshadowed by the dark objects of the past. With a quick start, as if he had awakened from sleep, he looked round, and demanded of one of the soldiers, many of whom were in the room, "Have you found the person accused—Richard Radford, I mean—has any one been taken in the premises and the house, besides the servants?"

"Yes, Sir, a person just arrived in a post-chaise," replied the sergeant.

"We must have order, Sir Robert," continued Layton, his powerful voice rising above the din; "there is much more to be done! Clear the room of your men, sergeant. They are not wanted here — but stay, I will speak with Mr. Haveland;" and he went out, followed by the sergeant and some half-dozen of the dragoons, who had accompanied their non-commissioned officer into the room.

Layton soon returned; but the precautions he had gone to enforce were vain. The person who had arrived in the chaise, proved to be a somewhat disreputable clergyman from a distant parish. Young Richard Radford was not taken; another fate awaited him. A man, indeed, on horseback, was seen to approach the grounds of Radford Hall towards eleven o'clock; but the lights, that were apparent through many windows, seemed to startle him, as he rode along the road. He paused for a moment, and gazed, and then advanced more slowly; but the eagerness of the small guard at that point, perhaps, frustrated their object, for it is not certain to this day who the person was. When he again halted, and seemed to hesitate, they dashed out after him; but instantly setting spurs to his horse, he galloped off into the woods; and knowing the country better than they did, he was soon lost to their pursuit.

In the meantime, the result of the search in Mr. Radford's house was made known, in a formal manner, to the party assembled in the small drawing-room. Abundant evidence was found of his having been implicated in all the most criminal parts of the late smuggling transactions; and the business of the night concluded, by an order to remand him, to be brought before the bench of magistrates on the following day; for Sir Robert Croyland declined to commit him on his own responsibility.

"He has preferred a charge against me," he said, in the same firm tone he had lately assumed — "let us see whether he will sustain it to-morrow."

Before all was concluded, it was near midnight; and then every one rose to depart. Mr. Croyland eagerly asked for Edith, saying he would convey her home in his carriage; but Layton interposed, replying, "We will bring her to you in a moment, my dear friend. — Sir Robert, it may be as well that you and I should seek Miss Croyland alone. I think I saw her maid below."

"Certainly," answered her father, "let us go, my dear Henry, for it is growing very late."

Mr. Croyland smiled, saying. "Well, well, so be it;" and the other two left the room. They found Edith, after some search, seated in the dining hall. She looked pale and anxious; but the expression of Layton's face relieved her of her worst apprehensions — not that it was joyful; for there was a touch of sadness in it; but she knew that his aspect could not be such, if her father's life were in any real danger.

Layton advanced towards her at once, even before her father, took her hand in his, and kissed it tenderly. "I told you, dearest Edith," he said, "that I would bring you aid; and I have, thank God, been able to redeem that promise; but now I have another task to perform. Your father's safety is placed beyond doubt — his innocence made clear; and your happiness, beloved one, is not sacrificed. The chance of endangering that happiness was the only cause of my not doing what, perhaps, you desired for his sake — what I do now. Sir Robert Croyland, I did wrong in years long past — in boyhood and the intemperance of youthful love and hope — by engaging your daughter to myself by vows, which she has nobly though painfully kept. As an atonement to you, as a satisfaction to my own sense of right, I now, as far as in me lies, set her free from those engagements, leaving to her own self how she will act, and to you how you will decide. Edith, beloved, you are free, as far as I can make you so; and, Sir Robert, I ask your forgiveness for the wrong act I once committed."

Edith Croyland turned somewhat pale, and looked at her father earnestly; but Sir Robert did not answer for a moment. — Was it that he hesitated? — No; but there was an oppressive weight at his heart, when he thought of all that he had done — all that he had inflicted, not only on the man before him, but on others guiltless of all offence, which seemed almost to stop its beating. But at length, he took Edith's hand and put it in Layton's, saying, in a low, tremulous voice, "She is yours, Henry — she is yours; and, oh, forgive the father for the daughter's sake!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was a solitary light in an upstairs window of Farmer Harris's house; and, by its dim ray, sat Harding the smuggler, watching the inanimate form of her upon whom all the strong affections of his heart had been concentrated. No persuasions could induce him to entrust "the first watch," as he called it, to others;

and there he sat, seldom taking his eyes from that pale but still beautiful countenance, and often stooping over to print a kiss upon the cold and clay-like forehead of the dead. His tears were all shed: he wept not — he spoke not; but the bitterness which has no end was in his heart, and, with a sleepless eye, he watched through the livelong night. It was about three o'clock in the morning, when a hard knocking was heard at the door of the farm; and, without a change of feature, Harding rose and went down in the dark. He unlocked the door, and opened it, when a hand holding a paper was thrust in, and instantly withdrawn, as Harding took the letter.

“What is this?” he said; but the messenger ran away without reply; and the smuggler returned to the chamber of death.

The paper he had taken was folded in the shape of a note, but neither sealed nor addressed; and, without ceremony, Harding opened it, and read. It was written in a free, good hand, which he recognised at once, with rage and indignation all the more intense because he restrained them within his own breast. He uttered not a word; his face betrayed, only in part, the workings of strong passion within him. It is true, his lip quivered a little, and his brow became contracted, but it soon relaxed its frown; and, without oath or comment — though very blasphemous expletives were then tolerated in what was called the best society, and were prevalent amongst all the inferior classes, — he proceeded to read the few lines which the letter contained, and which something — perhaps the emotions he felt — had prevented him from seeing distinctly at first.

The epistle was, as we have seen, addressed to no one, and was drawn up, indeed, more in the form of a general notice than anything else. Many, of nearly the same import, as was afterwards discovered, had been delivered at various farm-houses in the neighbourhood; but, as all were in substance the same, one specimen will suffice.

“We give you to know,” so the letter ran, “that, unless Edward Ramley and his two comrades are set free before daylight to-morrow, we will come to Goudhurst, and burn the place. Neither man, woman, nor child, shall escape. We are many — more than you think — and you know we will keep our word. So look to it, if you would escape — VENGANCE!”

Harding approached the bed, with the letter in his hand, gazed steadfastly upon the corpse for several minutes, and then, without a word, quitted the room. He went straight to the chamber which

Farmer Harris and his wife now occupied, and knocked sharply at the door, exclaiming, "Harris — Harris! I want to speak with you!"

The good farmer was with difficulty roused; for though no man felt more warmly, or, indeed, more vehemently, yet the corporeal had its full share with the mental; and when the body was fatigued with more than its ordinary portion of labour, the mind did not keep the whole being waking. At length, however, he came out, still drowsy, and taking the letter, gazed on it by the light of the candle, "with lack lustre eye!" But Harding soon brought him to active consciousness, by saying, "They threaten to burn the village, Harris, unless the murderers be suffered to escape. I am going up to the church, where they are kept. — Wake some one to sit up-stairs. — I will die before a man of them goes out."

"And so will I," cried Harris; "let me see — let me see! My heart's asleep still, but I'll soon wake up. Why, where the mischief did this come from?" and he read the letter over again, with more comprehension of its contents. When he had done, he swore vehemently, "They shall find that the men of Goudhurst can match them," he cried; "but we must set about it quick, Harding, and call up all the young men. — They will come, that is certain; for the devil himself has not their impudence; but they must be well received when they do come. We'll give them a breakfast, Harding, they shan't forget. It shall be called the Goudhurst breakfast, as long as men can remember. Stay, I'll just put on my coat, and get out the gun and the pistols — we shall want as many of those things as we can muster. I'll be back in a minute."

From that hour till five o'clock, the little village of Goudhurst was all alive. Intimation of the danger was sent to all the neighbouring farmers; every labouring man was roused from his bed with directions to meet the rest in the church-yard; and there, as the sky became grey, a busy scene was displayed, some sixty stout men being assembled before the porch, most of them armed with old muskets or fowling pieces. Amongst those to whom age or habitual authority assigned the chief place, an eager consultation went on as to their proceedings; and though there was, as is generally the case in such meetings, a great difference upon many points, yet three acts were unanimously decided upon; first, to send all the women and children out of the village — next, to despatch a messenger to Woodchurch for military aid — and, next, to set about casting bullets immediately, as no shot larger than slugs were to be found in the place.

The reader will probably ask, with a look of surprise, "Is this a scene in North America, where settlers were daily exposed to the incursions of the savages?" — and he may add, "This could not have happened in England!" But I beg to say, this happened in the county of Kent, less than a century ago; and persons are still living, who remember having been sent with the women and children out of the village, that the men might not be impeded by fear for those they loved, while defending the spot on which they were born.

A fire of wood was speedily lighted by some of the men in the church-yard; others applied themselves, with what moulds could be procured, to the casting of ball; others, again, woke the still slumbering inhabitants of the cottages and houses round, and warned the women to remove to the neighbouring farms, and the men to come and join their friends at the rendezvous; and a few of the best instructed proceeded to arrange their plan of defence, barricading the gates of the cemetery, and blocking up a stile, which at that time led from the right hand wall, with an old grave-stone, against which they piled up a heap of earth.

The vestry, in which the prisoners had been confined — after having been brought from Mr. Broughton's at too late an hour to convey them to gaol — was luckily protected by strong iron bars over the windows, and a heavy plated door between it and the church; and the old tower of the building afforded a strong point in the position of the villagers, which they flattered themselves could not easily be forced.

"How many men do you think they can muster, Harding?" asked Farmer Harris, when their first rude preparations were nearly complete.

"I can but guess," answered the smuggler; "perhaps two hundred. They had more than that in the Marsh, of whom I hear some fifty were taken or killed; but a good many were not there, who may, and will be here to-day — old Ramley for one, I should think."

"Then we had better get into the church when they come," replied the farmer; "they cannot force us there till the soldiers come."

"Did you send for them?" asked Harding.

"Oh, yes," answered the farmer, "half-an-hour ago. I sent the young boy, who would be of no good here, on the pony; and I told him to let Sir Robert know, as he passed; for I thought the soldiers might not meddle if they had not a magistrate with them."

"Very well," replied Harding, and set himself to work away again.

Six o'clock was now past, seven approached and went by; the hand of the dial moved half-way on to eight, and yet nothing indicated the approach of the smugglers. In a few minutes after, however, the sound of horses' feet galloping was heard; and a young man, who had been placed in the belfry to look out, shouted down to those below, "Only two!" and the next moment a horseman in military half dress, with a servant behind him, rode up at speed to the principal entrance of the church-yard.

"I am come to help you, my men," cried Sir Edward Digby, springing to the ground, and giving his rein to his servant — "Will you let us in to your redoubt? The dragoons will soon be over; I sent your messenger on."

"Perhaps, Sir, you may have your trouble for your pains, after all," answered young Harris, opening the gate, to let Digby and his horses in; "the fellows have not shown themselves, and very likely won't come."

"Oh, yes, they will," said the young baronet, advancing amongst them, and looking round on every side, "I saw a long line of men on horseback moving over the hill as I came. Put the horses under cover of that shed, Somers. You should cut down those thick bushes near the wall. They will conceal their movements. — Have you any axes?"

"Here is one," cried a young man, and immediately he set to work, hewing down the shrubs and bushes to which Digby pointed.

In the meantime, the young officer ran over the groups with his eye, calculating their numbers, and at length he said: "You had better confine yourselves to defending the church — you are not enough to meet them out here. I counted a hundred and fifty, and there may be more. Station your best marksmen at the windows and on the roof of the tower, and put a few stout resolute fellows to guard the door in case these scoundrels get nearer than we wish them. As we all act upon our own responsibility, however, we had better be cautious, and abstain from offensive measures, till they are absolutely necessary for the defence of ourselves and the security of the prisoners. Besides, if they are kept at bay for some time, the dragoons will take them in flank, and a good number may be captured."

"We can deal with them ourselves," said the voice of Harding, in a stern tone. He had been standing by, listening, in grave silence, with a gun in his hand, which he had borrowed at farmer Harris's; and now, as soon as he had spoken, he turned away,

walked into the church, and climbed to the roof of the tower. There, after examining the priming of the piece, he seated himself coolly upon the little parapet, and looked out over the country. The moment after, his voice was heard, calling from above — “They are coming up, Harris! — Tell the officer.”

Sir Edward Digby had, in the meantime, advanced to the gates to insure that they were securely fastened; but he heard what Harding said, and turning his head, exclaimed — “Go into the church; and garnish the windows with marksmen, as I said! I will be with you in a moment. — Here, Somers, help me here for a moment. They will soon pull this down;” and he proceeded calmly to fasten the barricade more strongly. Before he had accomplished this to his satisfaction, men on horseback were seen gathering thick in the road, and on the little open space in front; but he went on without pausing to look at them, till a loud voice exclaimed — “What are you about there? — Do you intend to give the men up, or not?”

Sir Edward Digby then raised his head and replied: “Certainly not! — Oh, Mr. Richard Radford — you will have the goodness to remark that, if you advance one step towards these gates, or attempt to pass that wall, you will be fired on from the church.”

While he was speaking, he took a step back, and then walked slowly towards the building, making his servant go first; but half-way thither he paused, and turning towards the ruffians congregated at a little distance from the wall, he added aloud, addressing Richard Radford — “You had better tell your gang what I say, my good friend, for they will find we will keep our word.”

As he spoke, some one from the mass fired a pistol at him; but the ball did not take effect, and Digby raised his hand, waving to those in the church not to fire, and at the same time hurrying his pace a little till he had passed the door and ordered it to be shut.

“They have now fair warning,” he said to one of the young Harris’s, who was on guard at the door; but I will go up above and call to you when I think anything is necessary to be done. — Remember, my good fellows, that some order must be kept; and as you cannot all be at the windows, let those who must stand back, load while the rest fire.”

Thus saying, he mounted to the top of the tower with a quick step, and found Harding and five others on the roof. The horsemen in front of the church, were all gathered together at a little distance, and seemed in eager consultation; and amongst them the figures of young Radford and the two Ramleys, father and son, were

conspicuous from the vehement gestures that they made — now pointing to the top of the tower, now to the wall of the churchyard.

“I think we could bring a good many down as they stand now,” said young William Harris, moving his gun towards his shoulder, as if the inclination to fire were almost irresistible.

“Stay — stay! not yet,” replied Sir Edward Digby; let it be clearly in our own defence. Besides, you must remember these are but fowling pieces. At that distance, few shots would tell.”

“One shall tell, at least, before this day is over,” said Harding, who had remained seated, hardly looking at the party without. “Something tells me, I shall have vengeance this day.”

“Hallo! they are going to begin!” cried another man; and the same moment, the gang of miscreants spread out, and while some advanced on horseback towards the wall, at least fifty, who were armed with guns, dismounted and aimed deliberately at the tower and the windows.

“Down with your heads behind the parapet!” cried Digby, though he did not follow the caution himself; “no use of exposing your lives needlessly. Down — down, Harding!”

But Harding sat where he was, saying, bitterly, “They’ll not hit me. — I know it — they’ve done worse already.” As he spoke, a single gun was fired, and then a volley, from the two sides of the church-yard wall. One of the balls whizzed close by Sir Edward Digby’s head, and another struck the parapet near Harding; but neither were touched, and the stout seaman did not move a muscle.

“Now up, and give it them back!” exclaimed Digby; and, speaking down the trap that led to the stairs, he called to those below, “Fire now, and pick them off! — Steadily — steadily!” he continued, addressing his companions on the roof, who were becoming somewhat too much excited. “Make every shot tell, if you can — a good aim — a good aim!”

“Here goes for one!” cried William Harris, aiming at Jim Ramley, and hitting him in the thigh; and instantly, from the roof and the windows of the church, blazed forth a sharp fire of musketry, which apparently was not without severe effect; for the men who had dismounted were thrown into great confusion, and the horsemen who were advancing recoiled, with several of their horses plunging violently.

The only one on the roof who did not fire was Harding, and he remained with his gun resting on the parapet beside him, gazing, with a stern, dark brow, upon the scene.

“There are three down,” cried one of the men, “and a lot of horses!”

But Richard Radford was seen gesticulating vehemently; and at length taking off his hat, he waved it in the air, shouting, so loud that his words reached those above, “I will show you the way, then; let every brave man follow me!” And as he spoke he struck his spurs into his horse’s sides, galloped on, and pushed his beast at the low wall of the church-yard.

The animal, a powerful hunter, which had been sent to him by his father the day before, rose to the leap as if with pride. But just then, Harding raised his gun, aimed steadily, and pulled the trigger. The smoke for a moment obscured Digby’s view; but the instant after he saw Richard Radford falling headlong from the saddle, and his shoulder striking the wall as the horse cleared it. The body then fell over, bent up, with the head leaning against a tombstone and the legs upon an adjoining grave.

“There! — that ’s done!” said Harding; and laying down the gun again, he betook himself quietly to his seat upon the parapet once more.

“The dragoons! the dragoons!” cried a young man from the other side of the tower. But ere he spoke, the gang of villains were already in retreat, several galloping away, and the rest wavering.

Loading as fast as they could, the stout yeomanry in the church continued firing from the windows and from the roof, accelerating the movements of their assailants, who seemed only to pause for the purpose of carrying off their wounded companions. Sir Edward Digby, however, ran round to the opposite side of the tower, and, clearly seeing the advance of some cavalry from the side of Cranbrook — though the trees prevented him from ascertaining their numbers — he bade the rest follow, and ran down into the body of the church.

“Now out, and after them!” he exclaimed; “we may make some prisoners!” But as soon as the large wooden doors were thrown back and the peasantry were seen pouring forth, old Ramley, who was amongst the last that lingered, turned his horse and galloped away, his companions following as fast as they could. Four men were found on the outside of the church-yard wall, of whom two were living; but Sir Edward Digby advanced with several others to the spot where Richard Radford was lying. He did not appear to have moved at all since he fell: and on raising his head, which had fallen forward on his chest as he lay propped up by the grave-stone, a dark red spot in the centre of the forehead,

from which a small quantity of blood had flowed down over his eyes and cheeks, told how fatally true the shot had gone to the mark.

When he had gazed on him for a moment, Digby turned round again, to look for Harding; but the man who had slain him, did not approach the corpse of Richard Radford; and Digby perceived him standing near a low shed, which at that time encumbered the church-yard of Goudhurst, and under which the young baronet's horses had been placed. Thither the strong hunter, which Radford had been riding, had trotted as soon as his master fell; and Harding had caught it by the bridle, and was gazing at it with a thoughtful look.

The last time Sir Edward Digby had seen him, before that morning, he was in high happiness by the side of poor Kate Clare; and when the young officer looked at him, as he stood there, with a sort of dull despair in his whole aspect, he could not but feel strong and painful sympathy with him, in his deep grief.

"Mr. Harding," he said, approaching him, "the unhappy man is quite dead."

"Oh, yes, Sir," answered Harding, "dead enough, I am sure. I hope he knew whose hand did it."

"I am sorry to give you any further pain or anxiety, at this moment," continued Digby, sinking his voice, "but I have heard that you are supposed to have taken some part in landing the goods which were captured the other day. For aught we know, there may be information lodged against you; and probably there will be some officer of Customs with the troop that is coming up. Would it not be better for you to retire from this scene for a little?"

"Thank you, Sir, — thank you! That is kind!" answered Harding. "Life's a load to me; but a prison is another thing. I would have given any of those clumsy fellows a hundred guineas to have shot me as I sat there, but no man shall ever take me, and clap me up in a cell. I could not bear that; and my poor Kate lying dead there, too! — I'll go, as you say."

But before he could execute his purpose, a small party of dragoons, commanded by a lieutenant, with Birchett, the riding officer, and two or three of his companions, came up at a trot, and poured through the gate of the church-yard, which was now open.

Sir Edward Digby advanced at once towards them — if the truth must be told, to cover Harding's retreat; but Birchett's quick, shrewd eye had run round the place in an instant; and, before the young baronet had taken two steps along the path, he

cried, "Why, there is Harding! Stop him! — stop him! We have information against him. Don't let him pass!"

"I *will* pass, though," cried Harding, leaping at once upon the back of Richard Radford's horse. "Now, stop me if you can!" and striking it with his heel, he turned the animal across the church-yard, taking an angle, away from the dragoons. Birchett spurred after him in a moment; and the other officers followed; but the soldiers did not move. Passing close by the spot where young Radford lay, as the officers tried to cut him off from the gate, Harding cried, with a wild and bitter laugh, "He is a good leaper, I know!" and instantly pushed his horse at the wall.

The gallant beast took it at once, and dashed away with its rider along the road. The officers of Customs dared not trust their own cattle with the same feat; but Birchett exclaimed, in a loud and imperative tone, turning to the lieutenant of dragoons, "I require your aid in capturing that man. He is one of the most daring smugglers on the whole coast. We can catch him easily, if we are quick."

"I do not know that I am authorized," said the lieutenant, not well pleased with the man's manner; "where no armed resistance is apprehended, I doubt if —"

"But there may be resistance, Sir," replied Birchett, vehemently; "he is gone to join his comrades. — Well, the responsibility be on your head! I claim your aid! Refuse it or not, as you shall think fit. — I claim and require it instantly!"

"What do you think, Sir?" asked the young officer, turning to Digby.

"Nay, I am not in command here," answered the other; "you know your orders."

"To give all lawful aid and assistance," said the lieutenant. "Well, take a sergeant's guard, Mr. Birchett."

In haste, the men were drawn out, and followed: Birchett leading them furiously on the pursuit; but ere they had quitted the church-yard, Harding was half-a-mile upon the road; and that was all he desired.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THERE was a large lugger lying off, at no great distance from the beach, near Sandgate, and a small boat, ready for launching, on the shore. At the distance of two or three miles out, might be seen a vessel of considerable size, and of that peculiar rig and build which denoted, to nautical eyes, that there lay a king's vessel.

She was, indeed, a frigate of inferior class, which had been sent round to co-operate with the Customs, in the suppression of the daring system of smuggling, which, as we have shown, was carried on in Romney Marsh, and the neighbouring country. By the lesser boat, upon the shore, stood four stout fellows, apparently employed in making ready to put off; and upon the high ground above, was seen a single officer of Customs, walking carelessly to and fro, and apparently taking little heed of the proceedings below. Some movements might be perceived on board the ship; the sails, which had been furled, now began to flutter in the wind, which was blowing strong; and it seemed evident that the little frigate was about to get under weigh. The lugger, however, remained stationary; and the men near the boat continued their labours for nearly an hour after they seemed in reality to have nothing more to do.

At length, however, coming at a furious pace, down one of the narrow foot-paths from the high ground above, which led away towards Cheriton ad Newington, was seen a horseman, waving his hand to those below, and passing within fifty yards of the officer of Customs. The sailors, who were standing by the boat, instantly pushed her down to the very verge of the water; the officer hallooed after the bold rider, but without causing him to pause for an instant in his course; and down, at thundering speed, across the road, and over the sand and shingle, Harding, the smuggler, dashed on, till the horse that bore him stood foaming and panting beside the boat. Instantly springing out of the saddle, he cast the bridle on the tired beast's neck, and jumped into the skiff, exclaiming, "Shove her off!"

"Arn't there some more, Jack?" asked one of the men.

"None but myself," replied Harding, "and me they shan't catch. — Shove her off, I say — you'll soon see who are coming after!"

The men obeyed at once; the boat was launched into the water; and almost at the same instant, the party of dragoons in pursuit appeared upon the top of the rise, followed, a moment after, by Birchett, and another officer of the Customs. The vehement and angry gestures of the riding officer indicated plainly enough that he saw the prey had escaped him; but while the dragoons and his fellow officer made their way slowly, down the bank, to the narrow road which at that time ran along the beach, he galloped off towards a signal-post, which then stood upon an elevated spot, not far from the place where the turnpike, on the

road between the Sandgate and Folkestone, now stands. In a few minutes various small flags were seen rapidly running up to the top of the staff; and, as speedily as possible afterwards, signals of the same kind were displayed on board the frigate.

In the meantime, however, Harding and his party had rowed rapidly towards the lugger; the sails of which were already beginning to fill; and in less than two minutes she was scudding through the water as fast as the wind would bear her. But the frigate was also under weigh; and, to both experienced and inexperienced eyes, it seemed that the bold smuggler had hardly one chance of escape. Between Dungeness Point, and the royal vessel, there appeared to be no space for any of those daring manœuvres by which the small vessels, engaged in the contraband trade, occasionally eluded the pursuit of their larger and more formidable opponents; but Harding still pursued his course, striving to get into the open sea, before the frigate could cut him off.

Bending under the press of sail, the boat rushed through the waves, with the uptide running strong against her, and the spray dashing over her from stem to stern; but still, as she took an angle, though an acute one, with the course of the frigate, the latter gained upon her every moment, till at length a shot, whistling across her bows, gave her the signal to bring to. It is needless to tell the reader, that signal received no attention; but, still steered with a firm hand, and carrying every stitch of canvas she could bear, the lugger pursued her way. A minute had scarcely passed, ere flash and report came again from the frigate, and once more a ball whistled by. Another and another followed; but, no longer directed across the lugger's bows, they were evidently aimed directly at her; and one of them passed through the foresail, though without doing any farther damage. The case seemed so hopeless, not only to those who watched the whole proceeding from the shore, but to most of those who were in the lugger, that a murmured consultation took place among the men; and after two or three more shots had been fired, coming each time nearer and nearer to their flying mark, one of the crew turned to Harding, who had scarcely uttered a word since he entered the boat, and said, "Come, Sir, I don't think this will do. — We shall only get ourselves sunk for no good. — We had better douse."

Harding looked sternly at him for a moment without reply; and a somewhat bitter answer rose to his lips. But he checked himself, and said, at length, "There 's no use sacrificing your lives. You 've got wives and children — fathers and mothers. I have no

one to care for me. — Get into the boat, and be off. Me they shall never catch, dead or alive; and if I go to the bottom, it's the best berth for me now. Here, just help me reeve these tiller-ropes that I may take shelter under the companion; and then be off as fast as you can."

The men would fain have remonstrated; but Harding would hear nothing; and, covering himself as much as he could from the aim of small arms from the vessel, he insisted that the whole of his crew should go and leave him.

A short pause in the lugger's flight was observable from the shore; and everybody concluded that she had struck. The row-boat, filled with men, was seen to pull off from her, and the large heavy sails to flap for an instant in the wind. But then her course was altered in a moment; the sails filled again with the full breeze; and going like a swallow over the waves, she dashed on towards the frigate, and, passing her within pistol-range immediately after, shot across upon her weather-bow.

A cloud of smoke ran all along the side of the frigate, as this bold and extraordinary manœuvre was executed. The faint report of small arms was wafted by the wind to the shore, as well as the sound of several cannon; but still, whether Harding was wounded or not wounded, living or dead, his gallant boat dashed steadily on, and left the frigate far behind, apparently giving up the chase, as no longer presenting any chance of success. On, on, went the lugger, diminishing as it flew over the waves, till at length, to the eyes even of those who watched from the heights, its dark, tanned sails grouped themselves into one small speck, and were then lost to the sight.

The after-fate of that adventurous man, who thus, single and unaided, trusted himself to the wide waves, is wrapped in obscurity. The writer of these pages, indeed, did once see a stern-looking old man of the same name, who had returned some few years before from distant lands — no one well knew whence — to spend the last few years of a life, which had been protracted considerably beyond the ordinary term of human existence, in a seaport not very far from Folkestone. The conversation of the people of the place pointed him out as one who had done extraordinary deeds, and seen strange sights; but whether he was, indeed, the Harding of this tale or not, I cannot say. Of one thing, however, the reader may be certain, that in all the statements regarding the smuggler's marvellous escape, the most scrupulous

accuracy has been observed, and that every fact is as true as any part of history, and a great deal more so than most.

Having now disposed of one of our principal characters, let me take the reader gently by the hand, and lead him back to Harbourn House. The way is somewhat long, but still, not more than a stout man can walk without fatigue upon a pleasant morning; and it lies, too, amongst sweet and interesting scenes — which, to you and me, dear reader, are, I trust, embellished by some of the charms of association.

It was about six days after the attack upon the church at Goudhurst, when a great number of those personages with whom it has been necessary to make the reader acquainted, were assembled in the drawing-room of Sir Robert Croyland's mansion. One or two, indeed, were wanting, even of the party which might have been expected there, but their absence shall be accounted for hereafter. The baronet himself was seated in the arm-chair, which he generally occupied more as a mark of his state and dignity, than for comfort and convenience. In the present instance, however, he seemed to need support, for he leaned heavily upon the arm of the chair, and appeared languid and feeble. His face was very pale, his lips somewhat livid; and yet, though suffering evidently under considerable corporeal debility, there was a look of mental relief in his eyes, and a sweet placidity about his smile, that no one had seen on his countenance for many years.

Mrs. Barbara was, as usual, seated at her everlasting embroidery; and here we may as well mention a fact which we omitted to mention before, but which some persons may look upon as indicative of her mental character — namely, that the embroidery, though it had gone on all her life, by no means proceeded in an even course of progression. On the contrary, to inexperienced eyes, it seemed as if no sooner was a stitch put in than it was drawn out again, the point of the needle being gently thrust under the loop of the thread, and then the arm extended with an even sweep, so as to withdraw the silk from its hole in the canvas. Penelope's web was nothing to Mrs. Barbara Croyland's embroidery; for the queen of Ithaca only undid what she had previously done, every night; and Aunt Bab undid it every minute. On the present occasion, she was more busy in the retroactive process than ever, not only pulling out the silk she had just put in, but a great deal more; so that the work of the last three days, was in imminent danger of total destruction.

Mr. Zachary Croyland never sat down when he could stand;

for there was about him, a sort of mobility and activity of spirits, which always inclined him to keep his body ready for action. He so well knew that, when seated, he was incessantly inclined to start up again, that probably he thought it of little use to sit down at all; and consequently he was even now upon his feet, midway between his brother and his sister, rubbing his hands, and giving a gay, but cynical glance from one to the other.

In a chair near the window, with his wild, but fine eye gazing over the pleasant prospect which the terrace commanded, and apparently altogether absent in mind from the scene in the drawing-room, was seated Mr. Osborn; and not far from Mr. Croyland stood Sir Henry Layton, in an ordinary riding-dress, with his left hand resting on the hilt of his sword, speaking in an easy, quiet tone to Sir Robert Croyland; and nearly opposite to him was Edith, with her arm resting on the table, and her cheek supported on her hand. Her face was still pale, though the colour had somewhat returned; and the expression was grave, though calm. Indeed, she never recovered the gay and sparkling look which had characterized her countenance in early youth; but the expression had gained in depth and intensity more than it had lost in brightness; and then, when she did smile, it was with ineffable sweetness: a gleam of sunshine upon the deep sea. Her eyes were fixed upon her lover; and those who knew her well could read in them satisfaction, love, hope — nay, more than hope — a pride, the only pride that she could know — that he whom she had chosen in her girlhood, to whom she had remained true and faithful through years of sorrow and unexampled trial, had proved himself in every way worthy of her first affection and her long constancy.

But where was Zara? — where Sir Edward Digby? for neither of them were present at the time. From the laws of attraction between different terrestrial bodies, we have every reason to infer that Digby and Zara were not very far apart. However, they had been somewhat eccentric in their orbits; for Zara had gone out about a couple of hours before — Digby being then absent, no one knew where — upon a charitable errand, to carry consolation and sympathy to the cottage of poor Mrs. Clare, whose daughter had been committed to the earth the day before. How it happened, Heaven only knows, but certain it is, that at the moment I now speak of, she and Digby were walking home together, towards Harbourne House, while his servant led his horse at some distance behind.

Before they reached the house, however, a long conversation

had taken place between the personages in the drawing-room, of which I shall only give the last few sentences.

"It is true, Harry, it is true," said Sir Robert Croyland, in reply to something just spoken by Layton; "and we have both things to forgive; but you far more than I have; and as you have set me an example of doing good for evil, and atoning, by every means, for a slight error, I will not be backward to do the same, and to acknowledge that I have acted most wrongly towards you — for which may Heaven forgive me, as you have done. I have small means of atoning for much that is past; but to do so, as far as possible: freely, and with my full consent, take the most valuable thing I have to give — my dear child's hand, — nay, hear me yet a moment. I wish your marriage to take place as soon as possible. I have learned to doubt of time, and never to trust the future. Say a week — a fortnight, Edith; but let it be speedily. It is my wish — let me say, for the last time, it is my command."

"But, brother Robert," exclaimed Mrs. Barbara, ruining her embroidery irretrievably in the agitation of the moment, "you know it can't be so very soon; for there are all the dresses to get ready, and the settlements to be drawn up, and a thousand things to buy; and our cousins in Yorkshire must be informed, and —"

"D—n our cousins in Yorkshire!" exclaimed Mr. Zachary Croyland. "Now, my dear Bab, tell me candidly, whether you have or have not any nice little plan ready for spoiling the whole, and throwing us all into confusion again. Don't you think you could just send Edith to visit somebody in the small-pox? or get Harry Layton run through in a duel? or some other little comfortable consummation, which may make us all as unhappy as possible?"

"Really, brother Zachary, I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Barbara, looking the picture of injured innocence.

"I dare say not, Bab," answered Mr. Croyland; "but I understand what you mean; and I tell you it shall not be. Edith shall fix the day; and as a good child, she will obey her father, and fix it as early as possible. When once fixed, it shall not be changed or put off, on any account or consideration whatever, if my name's Croyland. As for the dresses, don't you trouble your head about that; I'll undertake the dresses, and have them all down from London by the coach. Give me the size of your waist, Edith, upon a piece of string, and your length from shoulder to heel, and leave all the rest to me. If I don't dress her like a Mahomedan princess, may I never hear *Bismillah* again."

Edith smiled, but answered, "I don't think it will be at all necessary, my dear uncle, to put you to the trouble; and I do not think it would answer its purpose if you took it."

"But I will have my own way," said Mr. Croyland — "you are my pet; and all the matrimonial arrangements shall be mine. If you don't mind, and say another word, I'll insist upon being bridesmaid too; for I can enroach in my demands, I can tell you, as well as a lady, or a prime minister."

As he spoke, the farther progress of the discussion was interrupted by the entrance of Zara, followed by Sir Edward Digby. Her colour was a little heightened, and her manner somewhat agitated; but she shook hands with her uncle and Layton, neither of whom she had seen before during that morning; and then passing by her father, in her way towards Edith, she whispered a word to him as she went.

"What, what!" exclaimed Sir Robert Croyland, turning suddenly round towards Digby, with a look of alarm, and pressing his left hand upon his side, "she says you have something important to tell me, Sir Edward. — Pray speak! I have no secrets from those who are around me."

"I am sure, what I have to say will shock all present!" replied Sir Edward Digby, gravely; "but the fact is, I heard a report this morning, from my servant, that Mr. Radford had destroyed himself last night in prison; and I rode over as fast as I could, to ascertain if the rumour was correct. I found that it was but too accurate, and that the unhappy man terminated a career of crime, by the greatest that he could commit."

"Well, there 's one rascal less in the world — that 's some comfort," said Mr. Zachary Croyland; "I would rather, indeed, he had let some one else hang him, instead of doing it himself; for I don't approve of suicide at all — it's foolish, and wicked, and cowardly. Still, nothing else could be expected from such a man — but what 's the matter with you, Robert; you seem ill — surely, you can't take this man's death much to heart."

Sir Robert Croyland did not reply, but made a faint sign to open the window, which was immediately done; and he revived under the influence of the air.

"I will go out for a few minutes," he said, rising; and Edith, instantly starting up, approached to go with him. He would not suffer her, however — "No, my child," he replied to her offer, "no: you can understand what I feel; but I shall be better presently. Stay here, and let all this be settled; and remember,

Edith, name the earliest day possible — arrange with Zara and Digby. Theirs can take place at the same time."

Thus saying, he went out, and was seen walking slowly to and fro upon the terrace, for some minutes after. In the meanwhile, the war had commenced between Mr. Zachary Croyland and his younger niece. "Ah, Mrs. Madcap!" he exclaimed, "so I hear tales of you. The coquette has been caught at length! You are going to commit matrimony; and as birds of a feather flock together, the wild girl and the wild boy must pair."

With her usual light, graceful step, and with her usual gay and brilliant smile, Zara left Sir Edward Digby's side, and crossing over to her uncle, rested both her hands upon his arm, while he stood as erect and stiff as a finger post, gazing down upon her with a look of sour fun. But in Zara's eyes, beautiful and beaming as they were, there was a look of deeper feeling than they usually displayed when jesting, as was her wont, with Mr. Croyland.

"Well, Chit," he said, "well, what do you want? — a new gown, or a smart hat, or a riding-whip, with a tiger's head in gold at the top?"

"No, my dear uncle," she answered, "but I want you not to tease me, nor to laugh at me, nor to abuse me, just now. For once in my life, I feel that I must be serious; and I think even less teasing than ordinary might be too much for me. Perhaps, one time or another, you may find out that poor Zara's coquetry was more apparent than real, and that though she had an object, it was a better one than you, in your benevolence, were disposed to think."

An unwonted drop swam in her eyes as she spoke, and Mr. Croyland gazed down upon her tenderly for a moment. Then throwing his arms round her, he kissed her cheek — "I know it, my dear," he said — "I know it. Edith has told me all; and she who has been a kind, good sister, will, I am sure, be a kind, good wife. Here, take her away, Digby. A better girl doesn't live, whatever I may have said. The worst of it is, she is a great deal too good for you, or any other wild, harem-scarem fellow. But stay — stay," he continued, as Digby came forward, laughing, and took Zara's hand; "here's something with her; for, as I am sure you will be a couple of spendthrifts, it is but fit that you should have something to set out upon."

Mr. Croyland, as he spoke, put his hand into the somewhat wide and yawning pocket of his broad-tailed coat, and produced his pocket-book, from which he drew forth a small slip of paper.

Digby took it, and looked at it, but instantly held it out again to Mr. Croyland, saying, "My dear Sir, it is quite unnecessary. I claim nothing but her hand; and that is mine by promises which I hope will not be very long ere they are fulfilled."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried Mr. Croyland, putting away the paper with the back of his hand; "did ever any one see such a fool? — I tell you, Sir Edward Digby, I'm as proud a man as you are, and you shall not marry my niece without receiving the same portion as her sister possesses. I hate all eldest sons, as you well know; and I don't see why eldest daughters should exist either. I'll have them all equal. No differences here. I've made up to Zara, the disparity which one fool of an uncle thought fit to put between her and Edith. Such was always my intention; and moreover, let it clearly be understood, that when you have put this old carrion under ground, what I leave is to be divided between them — all equal, all equal — co-heiresses, of Zachary Croyland, Esq., surnamed the Nabob, alias the Misanthrope — and then, if you like it, you may each bear in your arms a crow rampant, on an escutcheon of pretence."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear uncle," answered Edith Croyland, while Zara's gay heart was too full to let her speak — "thank you for such thought of my sweet sister; for, indeed, to me, during long years of sorrow and trouble, she has been the spirit of consolation, comfort, strength — even hope."

Poor Zara was overpowered; and she burst into tears. It seemed as if all the feelings, which for the sake of others she had so long suppressed — all the emotions, anxieties, and cares which she had conquered or treated lightly, in order to give aid and support to Edith, rushed upon her at once in the moment of joy, and overwhelmed her.

"Why, what's the foolish girl crying about?" exclaimed Mr. Croyland; but then, drawing her kindly to him, he added, "Come, my dear, we will make a truce, upon the following conditions — I won't tease you any more; and you shall do everything I tell you. In the first place, then, wipe your eyes, and dry up your tears; for if Digby sees how red your cheeks can look, when you've been crying, he may find out that you are not quite such a Venus as he fancies just now — There, go along!" and he pushed her gently away from him.

While this gayer conversation had been going on within, Mr. Osborn had passed through the glass doors, and was walking slowly up and down with Sir Robert Croyland. The subject they

spoke upon must have been grave; for there was gloom upon both their faces when they returned.

"I know it," said Sir Robert Croyland to his companion as they entered the room; "I am quite well aware of it; it is that which makes me urge speed."

"If such be your view," replied Mr. Osborn, "you are right, Sir Robert; and Heaven bless those acts, which are done under such impressions."

The party in the drawing-room heard no more; and, notwithstanding the kindly efforts of Mrs. Barbara, and a thousand little impediments, which, "with the very best motives in the world," she created or discovered, all the arrangements for the double marriage were made with great promptitude and success. At the end of somewhat less than a fortnight, without any noise or parade, the two sisters stood together at the altar, and pledged their troth to those they truly loved. Sir Robert Croyland seemed well and happy; for during the last few days previous to the wedding, both his health and spirits had apparently improved. But, ere a month was over, both his daughters received a summons to return, as speedily as possible, to Harbourne House. They found him on the bed of death, with his brother and Mr. Osborn sitting beside him. But their father greeted them with a well-contented smile, and reproved their tears in a very different tone from that which he had been generally accustomed to use.

"My dear children," he said, in a feeble voice, "I have often longed for this hour; and though life has become happier now, I have, for many weeks, seen death approaching, and have seen it without regret. I did not think it would have been so slow; and that was the cause of my hurrying your marriage; for I longed to witness it with my own eyes, yet was unwilling to mingle the happiness of such a union, with the thought that it took place while I was in sickness and danger. My brother will be a father to you, I am sure, when I am gone; but still it is some satisfaction to know that you have both better protectors, even here on earth, than he or I could be. I trust you are happy; and believe me, I am not otherwise — though lying here with death before me."

Towards four o'clock on the following day, the windows of Harbourne House were closed; and, about a week after, the mortal remains of Sir Robert Croyland were conveyed to the family vault in the village church. Mr. Croyland succeeded to the estates and title of his brother; but he would not quit the mansion

which he himself had built, leaving Mrs. Barbara, with a handsome income, which he secured to her, to act the Lady Bountiful of Harbourne House.

The fate of Edith and Zara we need not farther trace. It was such as might be expected from the circumstances in which they were now placed. We will not venture to say that it was purely happy; for when was ever pure and unalloyed happiness found on earth? There were cares, there were anxieties, there were griefs, from time to time: for the splendid visions of young imagination may be prophetic of joys that *shall* be ours, if we deserve them in our trial here, but are never realized within the walls of our mortal prison, and recede before us, to take their stand for ever beyond the portals of the tomb. But still they were as happy as human things, perhaps, ever were; for no peculiar pangs or sufferings were destined to follow those which had gone before; and in their domestic life, having chosen well and wisely, they found — as every one will find, who judges upon such grounds — that love, when it is pure, and high, and true, is a possession, to the brightness of which even hope can add no sweetness, imagination no splendour that it does not in itself possess.

The reader may be inclined to ask the after fate of some of the other characters mentioned in this work. In regard to many of them, I must give an unsatisfactory reply. What became of most, indeed, I do not know. The name of Mowle, the officer of Customs, is still familiar to the people of Hythe and its neighbourhood. It is certain that Ramley and one of his sons were hanged; but the rest of the records of that respectable family are, I fear, lost to the public. Little Starlight seems to have disappeared from that part of the country, for some time; and in truth, I have no certainty that the well-known pickpocket, Night Ray, who was transported to Botany Bay, some thirty years after the period of this tale, and was shot in an attempt to escape, was the same person whose early career is here recorded. But of one thing the reader may be perfectly certain, that — whatever was the fortune which attended any of the persons I have mentioned — whether worldly prosperity, or temporary adversity befel them — the real, the solid good, the happiness of spirit, was awarded in exact proportion to each, as their acts were good, and their hearts were pure.

THE END.

Yh



James, G. P. R.

The smuggler a tale

Leipzig 1845

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